

THE GHOST CITY

THE GHOST CITY

BY

G. K. CHETTUR



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

S O U N D S A N D I M A G E S

(Verse)

Erskine Macdonald, London

—
T H E T E M P L E T A N K*

(Verse)

—
G U M A T A R A Y A*

(Verse)

—
T H E T R I U M P H O F L O V E*

(Verse)

—
T H E L A S T E N C H A N T M E N T*

(Recollections of Oxford)

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THE GHOST CITY

I do not believe in ghosts. I am merely stating a fact. My friend Viswanath tells me that I take a pride in my unbéief, but this is not true. I cannot, I admit, help feeling faintly amused when people speak in my hearing of tables that turn, and spirits that rap, and ghosts they have seen, huge leering faces, you know, that appear only to vanish. I am sorry, of course, if my attitude is misconstrued as one of superiority. It is not that at all.

I am rather a bored kind of person, languid, you know, dull, cold-blooded, unemotional. I think I was born that way. And from experience I have discovered that it is more boring than ever when

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one has nothing to do. This is an affliction I have to endure most days of my life, but it is in the rainy season that my enforced idleness, and consequently my increased boredom, become almost insufferable. At such times, on such occasions, you can readily imagine that I am more than grateful for even the least distraction. And that was how it happened the other day.

It was raining cats and dogs. No, it was worse. It was raining a whole menagerie. And it had been doing so for days. I was sitting on the verandah looking cheerlessly out on a sodden prospect, when it struck me quite suddenly that all this water was bound to collect somewhere, and that that would mean trouble. I was right, of course; our ~~fl~~^{fl} is this year have been unprecedented; I don't suppose it could ever have rained like this before. Well, it was just as I was thinking out this calamitous problem that I suddenly perceived a man who was holding an ~~un~~^{un}rella and seemingly quite naked, turn hurriedly in ^{at} the gates. It took me quite a minute to ~~real~~^{real}ize that he was not really naked, and that he had only tucked up his cloth as far as his waist to avoid getting it wet in the rain that came down in a fierce slant. I watched him come quickly up the drive,

wondering whether he would turn out to be a bill-collector. My visitor stepped nimbly into the porch, closed his umbrella, placed it point upwards in a corner, shook his clothes slowly down, and then perceiving me, hastily joined his hands together and made a low obeisance. I had had time to make up my mind that he could not be a bill-collector; he looked far too respectable. His serge coat was almost new, gold studs adorned his silk shirt, and there were diamonds in his ears. A man of middle height, and as far as I could judge, of middle age; of a cast of countenance almost solemn in its settled gravity, but embellished with a pair of eyes of almost Carrolian gentleness. Here, I felt, was a man to be trusted, to whom, if called upon, I could give a character on sight. Not to be out-done in courtesy, I rose and returned his salutation, and indicating a chair, requested him to be seated. He did so with grave deliberation.

“I am grateful to you, Sir,” he said slowly, in excellent English, and glancing about him with interest, “for affording me shelter from the rain. I shou’d not have troubled you, but I have come far, and I have yet some way to go.”

“It is nothing.” I replied “Pray do not mention it. I am glad to be of service. Rotten weather to be out in, is it not?”

“That it is,” he agreed, and apparently finding nothing further to say remained quite silent. I understood and appreciated that silence. I am myself nothing of a conversationalist, and am given to few words. I have no regard whatever for the aimless talk so constantly indulged in for the mere sake of talking. Nor have the good Gods gifted me with the patience which enables some people to suffer fools gladly. Distinctly I was beginning to like my visitor. I was certain he shared these limitations with me. It was just as I arrived at this conclusion of affinity that my friend began to speak. He did so with a jerk.

“My name,” he said, “is Tamarahalli Shankara-narayana Sivasubramania Hegde—”

“Oh!—” I said. I could not for the life of me have kept back that exclamation. It conveyed both astonishment and respect. I have a respect for long names, and I have an odd fancy that the people who bear them get more out of life somehow. I looked at the man before me with increased interest.

“You have a beautiful name,” I said, “anyhow.”

My friend, however, ignored this remark altogether; instead, he had a far-away light in his eyes. “And,” he continued, piecing out his first state-

ment, as though I had not interrupted at all, "I am a native of Karkapi. Six months ago I was elected vice-president of the taluq-board. But," he added, laying the palm of his left hand flat on the table, and looking fixedly at me, "I must ask you a question. Do you believe in ghosts?"

I have had this question put to me more than a hundred times at least in the course of my uneventful existence, but never before at such short notice. I confess I was rather taken aback. In my philosophy of life, ghosts and vice-presidents of taluq-boards do not go together. The juxtaposition seemed to me not a little startling. I thought however that I would make sure.

"Ghosts?" I asked, "Did you say ghosts?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Hegde, in a courteously patient voice, "I said ghosts. Do you believe in them?"

"No," I said, "If you really do mean ghosts, I do not. Please do not ask me why I do not believe. I should find it difficult to give reasons. The fact remains however; but I beg you will not let that stand in the way. It is a small matter. Let us agree to differ. You believe; I do not. Very well, we will leave it there. You were saying?—"

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“Sir,” said Mr. Hegde, “It is not a small matter. It is a matter of the utmost importance. When you have heard my story, you will see how vitally it is based upon this element of belief.”

“Oh,” I said, “So there’s a story.”

“Yes, but I doubt whether there would be any use my narrating it, since you are so sceptical in these matters.”

“Mr. Hegde,” I said kindly, “You do not know me. I am a man of stern principles and fixed beliefs. But at the same time I flatter myself, that there is no one more open to conviction. You have a story. Now I believe in stories. Tell me your story, and I shall endeavour to bring to it an impartial judgment. The rain,” I continued, “still shows no signs of giving over. I trust you are comfortable. Allow me to offer you a cigar. No? Well then, I am all attention.”

“Sir,” said my companion, “You do not understand me. Perhaps you will before I am done. My story does not take long to tell. But such as it is, I think you will find it interesting. I have already told you who I am, and where I come from. Twelve years ago I was the victim of a very curious adventure.”

“Twelve years” I murmured, “Dear me, that’s a very long time.”

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“It is,” agreed my visitor, rather put off by my interruption, “but if it had been twelve-hundred, that would have made no difference to the vividness with which I remember things. In fact I cannot forget. The whole thing happened as the result of a wager I foolishly entered into with some of my friends, that I would walk the whole distance from Karkapi to this city, very nearly sixty-seven miles, in one day and one night. In those days there were no motor-buses, and the country carts took over three days to do the journey. I was sure of my walking powers and was certain of winning the wager. It struck me that I could, at the same time, do a little business. I am in a small way a dealer in diamonds, and a wealthy customer from this town had written for some stones. He wanted me to bring all that I had with me to choose from, to make jewels for his youngest daughter who was about to be married. It would take more than three days by cart, whereas I would be not more than twenty-four hours winning the wager. I decided I would take the stones with me. Concealed about my person, nothing would be easier to carry. Nobody would suspect that I carried so much wealth with me. I felt it would be quite safe. To make assurance doubly sure, I decided

I would take my younger brother with me. He was quite as good a walker as I was, and besides, being of a very light-hearted and joyous nature, he was certain to prove pleasant company. One day at sunrise, then, we started. If by sunrise the next day we reported ourselves to a friend in this town, I had won my wager. I will not dwell on the first part of our walk. It was pleasant enough; the roads were shady, and we had all the exhilarating sense of an adventure. By six o'clock in the evening we had accomplished, without undue strain, forty-one miles of our journey. A few minutes rest by the way side and we were off again. Soon night closed over us, and the wonderful stars looked suddenly down upon us. For some time we walked with our eyes fixed upon the heavens trying to make out the familiar constellations; they seemed to follow us in such a friendly manner up hill and down dale, as though they were deeply interested in the success of our venture. It was an exclamation from my brother that suddenly brought me down to earth again. We had just reached the top of a hill, down the side of which the road wound into the valley below.

“‘Look!’ said my brother, ‘look! what are those lights?’

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“Gazing in the direction in which he was pointing, I saw thousands of twinkling points of light, in the valley before us, less than a mile away. Only a very large city could account for such a phenomenon, but I knew of no such city in the vicinity. Nor did my brother.

“‘This is strange’ I said, ‘Two months ago I came this way, and there was nothing here. We can’t have missed our way either, for here is the road I have travelled by so frequently.’

“It was certainly very strange; surely a whole city could not have come into existence in the space of two months. We rubbed our eyes and looked again, but the twinkling fires were still there. Our road appeared to lead right down into the city. It seemed as though we should have to pass through it whether we liked it or not. In any case we decided to investigate.

“We walked quickly down, and in a few minutes satisfied ourselves that the lights we had seen were really the lights of a city, and marvelling greatly, we walked up the streets, looking curiously to the right and to the left at the magnificent houses and the wonderful temples, all of them lighted up as for a festival. Truly it must have been a very important festival, for the streets were full of people

in gala robes, and presently with blare of trumpet and crash of drum, a huge car adorned with flowers and resplendent with a hundred lights came along, followed by a most impressive procession of priests, and torches, and people. They stared curiously at us, such of them as saw us, and we noticed suddenly that they wore dresses different from ours, and that they spoke a language, which, though we could understand it with difficulty, was certainly not the one we were accustomed to. All this was very puzzling and confusing, and we would gladly have found our way out of the city, and on to our proper road. We tried to do so, but in a few minutes discovered that we had lost our way. We always seemed to come back to one particular spot, and never to find the way out of the town. Imagine, Sir, our distress. We made attempts to ask some of the people we came across, but they only looked at us and burst out laughing. There seemed to be something very funny about us, though we failed to see it. At the end of an hour's wandering we came to what looked like a small hostelry. We decided to go in and ask our way. On entering, we found that a feast was in progress, to which we were welcomed by the host, or so at least we thought him to be, for he rose immediately

and made a speech, though what he said we could only surmise, and had places set for us. Thus we were compelled to join the diners, and indeed with the rich tempting food before us we felt very hungry, and did justice to our host's hospitality. But there must have been something in what we drank or ate, for very soon afterwards we felt unaccountably sleepy. Our host came to us and begged that he might have the pleasure of accommodating us for the night. We told him drowsily that we were compelled to resume our journey, but in the very middle of our combined attempt to do so, everything seemed to go dark. I remember that I fell forward but I remember nothing more

"I returned to consciousness in the pale light of early morning, and found myself lying close to a thorny bush. A few yards away my brother was still sleeping. I went over and woke him, and together we gazed at the dreary expanse of waste land that stretched away before us, wondering whether we were dreaming or awake. There was not the ghost of a trace of the city. We gazed and gazed with a sickening sense of surprise and disappointment. Suddenly my brother turned to me. 'Your wager!— You have lost it!—' he exclaimed. It was this which roused me to the reality of things. We were still over

twenty-five miles from our destination, and I certainly had lost my bet! The fact revived other memories. A sudden fear shot through me. Like lightning my hand went to the place in which I had concealed my diamonds. But I felt the little packet, safe, where I had stitched it into my coat. Oh the deep sigh of relief I heaved. My diamonds at least, were safe! To make sure I took off my coat, and ripped out the packet, and opened it. It contained exactly the same number of stones I had placed in it so carefully, but they were not diamonds. *Twenty-nine little bits of gravel lay snugly in their place! —*

“What!” I exclaimed.

“Yes” was the reply. “Twenty-nine bits of gravel, instead of my precious diamonds. Conceive my disappointment, my terror, my misery, my anguish!—I groaned aloud and cursed everything I could think of, but chiefly myself and the day I was born. My brother was equally distressed, but just as much at a loss to know what to do. We sat down to collect our senses, to think what we should do next. At last we decided to go on, and place the facts before the police in this town. We did so, but we were only laughed at for our story, when we got here. One thing,

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however, was quite definite. We had lost diamonds to the value of over eight thousand rupees, and we were told that every effort would be made to trace the thieves and to recover the stolen property. Nobody, however, could explain the apparition of the city we had seen. Everybody assumed that we had dreamed that. It was nearly a month afterwards that we came across a very old man who told a garbled tale of a ghost city. He did not express any surprise whatever at the police not finding a clue to the robbery. He took that for granted."

My visitor paused slightly, whether out of contempt for the police, or sheer fatigue at his long narration, I could not quite make out.

"Yes," I said leaning forward, "But what was the story the old man told you? Surely that is the most important part of your tale."

"The most important part of my tale, Sir," replied my friend, "is the loss that I suffered. If you should lose eight thousand rupees suddenly in the most unaccountable manner, chiefly as the result of your own foolishness, you would consider very few things more important. But I will tell you what the old man told me. He said that many hundreds of years ago a great Jain City had

flourished over the identical spot in which my adventure had taken place, but that it had fallen into ruins, and disappeared altogether, owing to what cause he knew not. And there was a legend, it seems, that the city came into existence for the space of one night, once every twelve years. According to the old man, my brother and I had hit upon one of these duo-decennial resurrections, and lived for the space of twelve hours in a city of ghosts."

"That's a very pretty explanation," I said, "but did he, the old man, I mean, suggest a remedy for the loss you had sustained? You lost eight thousand rupees in a ghost-city. I should have said there wasn't the ghost of a chance of your recovering that money."

"That is what I have yet to see," said my visitor, "The old man seemed very confident. He desired me to wait for twelve years, and go to the same place, at the same time, and he was sure my stones would be changed back to diamonds. I have of course long given up hope of seeing them again but I believe in ghosts and I am tempted to believe also in what the old man said."

Suddenly light broke in upon me.

"Hold!" I cried, "All this happened to you twelve years ago you said?"

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“Twelve years,” replied my friend, “to the very day.”

“Mr. Hegde,” I said, “I have an idea what you are going to do. You are going to test the words of that old man. You are going to try to get into that ghost city again. I have already told you that I do not believe in ghosts. Your story is an extremely interesting one, but it does not shake my belief. As I said, on this point we will agree to differ. I shall be glad to know what the result of your adventure is. You are an adventurous man. You deserve success, and I hope you may come by it.”

“Your conclusion, Sir,” said Mr. Hegde, “is perfectly correct. I am not very hopeful, but I mean to try to get into that ghost-city again, come what may. And now,” he added, “As the rain has almost stopped, I think I will be going on again. I thank you sir, for your courtesy and your kindness. I shall certainly let you know what the upshot of my quest is. I only trust that in case I am successful, you will see your way to revising your theory about the existence of ghosts.”

“Very well, Mr. Hegde,” I said with a laugh, “The best of luck in any case.” And so we shook hands and parted.

Now, this story should properly end here. Unfortunately it has a sequel, which must be told. Mr. Hegde's story was startling enough. But there are a great many things, even more startling, in life. Burglaries, for instance. It was barely three days after the visit I have recorded that my house was burgled, and silver and jewels to the value of fourteen thousand rupees, stolen. The Police busied themselves with arresting half a hundred people who had not the remotest connection with the affair, and letting them go again. I hate to bring these personal matters into my story, but they possess a certain value in the light of a letter I received from Mr. Hegde about a month after the robbery. It was undated, and there was nothing to show where it came from. Here it is:

Dear Sir,

You may remember that I promised to let you know the result of my adventure. I am pleased to inform you that it was perfectly successful. I recovered my diamonds together with a sum of money calculated to cover the interest at six per cent. on the value of my stones, for a period of twelve years. My success would appear to justify the belief

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which you do not share with me. I trust you will now see reason enough to modify your opinions regarding ghosts.

Yours very faithfully,

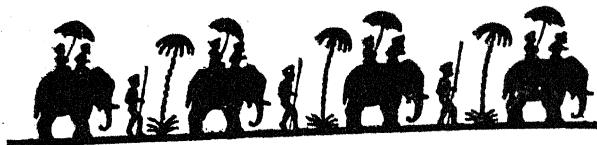
T. S. S. S. HEGDE.

P. S.—I was wrong in my reckoning of the time by three days.

So that was how it was! The cheek of the fellow, I thought, with his wager, and his diamonds, and his city of ghosts! But how completely he had taken me in, and all the time he had been reconnoitring, finding out the lie of the land, so to speak! Well, well, well!—I sent the letter on to the Police, at once, and you will be glad to hear that they are making very determined investigations indeed.—So far, however, nothing has come to light.

As for ghosts, after all this, need I say that I still do not believe in them? That my disbelief is even more firmly rooted than before?





ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

It is not everybody that is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but I rather fancy Saunderson was. If you ask me why, I shall be compelled to tell you the story of how he came by his job, for that I think is the finest proof of Saunderson's luck. The tale, I may say, is not without interest; from certain points of view it is almost romantic.

I don't suppose you know Saunderson. It does not matter, because if you read on, you will get a fairly good idea of him from what I am going to tell you. In the first place, his name isn't Saunderson at all, but *Sundaresan*, the transformation having been achieved on the eve of his departure

for England. This, in itself, should tell you a great deal about the man. Secondly, you are to picture in your mind's eye a singularly pleasant-looking fellow with charming manners, whose admiration for western culture is second only to his faith in Jupiter, which he believes to be particularly interested in his destiny. Thirdly, you are to understand that at the beginning of this story he has just returned from Oxford, and is actively on the look out for a Government appointment, which, on the strength of a dashing personality and his Oxford degree, he has every reason to be confident of securing.

Things, however, are not as they seem, and Saunderson was not long in realizing that a good appointment under Government is not to be obtained quite so easily as one imagines. As he walked along the Marina in the evenings, (the only recreation he permitted himself in those days of torment and anxiety) he brooded bitterly over the many fruitless efforts he had made, the innumerable applications he had written out, and the countless Officials he had interviewed. It did not occur to him to remember in these melancholy moments, the well-known truths, that the darkest hour is before the dawn, and that there is no

cloud without its silver lining, not to mention the indisputable fact that the wheel of Fortune when it is at its lowest is bound to move upwards, no matter which way it is pushed. The push, literally as well as metaphorically, came from Zulu.

Zulu, or more correctly Somayajulu, was, I ought to explain, the Zemindar of Chotacole. He had more money than brains, and all his friends voted him a very decent fellow, from which you may gather that he was free with his cash, jovial by nature, and lacking in guile. His one passion was motoring; and when I add that he took up the study of Military Strategy as a Special Subject for his Schools at Oxford, on the suggestion of an unsuspecting tutor, you have as complete a picture of the man as you need to have for the progress of this story. Saunderson had been his most intimate friend at Oxford. Catching sight of him in the distance, on the Marina, one evening, Zulu made haste to overtake him. As for Saunderson, at the moment that a hearty slap on his back sent him stumbling a couple of paces forward, Zulu was the last person in his thoughts. You may imagine his astonishment, therefore, when he turned to look at the perpetrator of this outrage on his person and recognized his old Oxford chum, whom he had

last seen four months back at Tilbury docks waving him farewell.

“Hullo Zulu!”

“Hullo Sandy!”

“Where in the world have you sprung from? I thought you were in Oxford.”

After the preliminary grip of hands, Zulu fell into stride by the side of Saunderson, and explained that he had been cabled for on account of his mother's illness, but had arrived to find her recovered and in perfect health.

“And I am not going back yet,” he added, “not for another three months. There are one or two things I've got to look into up at Chotacole. Awful nuisance, but one can't help these things.”

As you may imagine, Zulu was a god-send to Saunderson, and the former had to face quite a barrage of questions concerning friends in England.

“Look here,” said Zulu at last, “let's go and sit on the sands. Those nets there look very inviting.” And he dragged the unresisting Saunderson down to the shore.

“And how are things with you?” asked Zulu during a temporary lull in the storm of enquiries that raged about him.

"Putrid!" said Saunderson, contracting his brows, and looking miserable again.

"I thought you didn't look too pleased with yourself, when I saw you! What's the matter? How are we off for a job, eh?"

"Nothing doing!" replied Saunderson, looking the other way. "Not a blessed opening anywhere. I've been going the rounds ever since I got back. It doesn't seem as though they want my services anywhere. What price Oxford?" he added bitterly.

"Oh cheer up! Things aren't as bad as you make them out, surely. It's all a matter of waiting. With your qualifications—"

"Qualifications be hanged!" exclaimed Saunderson. "I am sick of my qualifications. I wish I had never gone to England. It's all very well for you to say it is a matter of waiting. You have got pots of money and can do as you like. But poor devils like me —"

"Nonsense! Don't talk rubbish!"

"It isn't rubbish, and it isn't nonsense. You have no idea how anxious and miserable I have been going literally from door to door. Do you see that steamer on the horizon?" he continued peering disconsolately into the gathering gloom. "They have just lit the lights on board. The

isn't a steamer I see but I wish I were in it going back to England, to Oxford! Life here is just awful, awful Take the girls," he added, a moment later, as though to illustrate his point, "take the girls here; the moment you look at them they fade, wilt, wither, if you know what I mean. Like so many Touch-me-nots. They are so shy, so self-conscious, so sex-ridden. *You* would call that modesty, I suppose. If they hadn't any clothes on, they couldn't behave more idiotically God, what a life!—"

"And what about the girls in Europe?" cried Zulu indignantly, "Are they any different really speaking? What about *their* clothes? Do you call *that* modesty?"

"I don't know what you mean by modesty. Do clothes make modesty?"

"Don't they?"

"Zulu," said Saunderson solemnly, "I don't feel like an epigram at the moment, but you inspire me to one. The girls out West mayn't have much on, in the way of clothes, but they behave as though they don't know it. And that it seems to me is the essential difference between them and their sisters out here. They are more free, more friendly, more human—"

“Stop it, Sandy!” cried Zulu. “I won’t hear any more. You are talking rank nonsense. You say you are dying to return to England. I tell you I am jolly glad to get back here. What you want, my dear fellow, is to be taken out of yourself. Too much brooding seems to have softened your brain. And I think I know exactly what you require.”

“And what do I require, pray?”

“Something to keep you from worrying. A little distraction, I think.”

“Heavens!” murmured Saunderson, “As though I were not distracted enough already. Hold me somebody!—Come,” he added more seriously, “what’s the scheme?”

“I will tell you in a few days,” said Zulu, “I have an idea, but I haven’t thought out the details yet. Tomorrow I have to run up to Chotacole. An uncle of mine has wired for me. From all accounts he seems to have got into rather a mess about his only daughter. Rather like the old man of Nantucket!”

“Which old man?”

“Don’t you know? The one *who kept all his cash in a bucket!*—”

“Oh yes. *But his daughter named Nan—*”

“Quite so. *Ran away with a man—*”

“And as for the bucket, Nan took it!

“Precisely.”

And they both laughed. “Damn it!” said Saunderson, “this is the first time I’ve had a good laugh since I got back.”

“Ah, you are improving already,” said Zulu. “Wait till I get back from Chotacole next week, and then we shall see about a complete cure.”

Exactly a week later you might have found them deep in converse on the same spot. Saunderson had called at Spender’s Hotel, and they had motored down to the Marina in Zulu’s luxurious Rolls. “Not a word till we get on to the sands” Zulu had said, and there was suppressed excitement in his voice. Saunderson looking much brighter than was his wont these days, leaned gracefully back against the coiled netting, and turned an expectant eye on his friend, who seemed gazing into the middle distance.

“Now look here Sandy,” said Zulu suddenly, “Are you sure that you have done everything—everything in the way of preliminaries I mean—for your job—applications—interviews—and all that sort of rot?”

“Have I not?” exclaimed Saunderson wearily, “Ask of the winds that far around with fragments

strewed the sea! From door to door and no stone unturned, should be my motto. I'm not taking any chances, not I; I saw the Member-in-Charge this morning."

"You mean Sir What's-his-name?"

"Yes."

"I am sure you didn't get much out of him! I am told he is rather a fiery old bird, and has a very short way with him."

"He was at his shortest then, this morning. Fiery isn't the word for it. I wasn't in the room for more than a minute before he was nodding me out again. Said there wasn't the least hope for ages. Anything else? Well then, Good Morning! That was the style."

"Never mind," said Zulu, "give it a rest. Come away with me and forget all about it."

"What do you mean, come away with you?"

"Just what I say. I've had a brain-wave. The other day I saw a lovely motor caravan at Adimpsons, beautifully appointed, and just right for two. It struck me that it was the very thing for a long holiday trip. I want to make a study of our South Indian Hill-fortresses. Old Wilkinson, my tutor you know, with whom I'm doing Military Tactics, suggested I might do this when I got back,

and really, now that I come to think of it, it does seem a capital idea. And when you see the caravan you will think so too. I purchased the thing this morning, and it's going to be delivered tomorrow. What say you to joining me on the expedition? There's no use your saying 'No', because I've made up my mind that you are coming."

Saunderson whose breath had been taken away by the suddenness and the strangeness of the proposal could only stare at his friend.

"Oh you have, have you?" he said at last
"And what about my job?"

"Oh give those poor fellows a rest; and give yourself a rest; and I'm sure when you get back after a couple of months or so, you will find things more hopeful all round."

Saunderson did not require much persuasion, as you may imagine. He said he would take a day to think it over, but I fancy he had made up his mind already. Life, with its dreary round of waiting and hanging about the doors of Authority, had become too sickening for words. If he had been in any doubt at all, a glance at the caravan would have dispelled them all utterly. To say that it was a gorgeous affair is to put it mildly. From the nude nickel-plated nymph with wings, on the radiator

cap, to the treble-barred bumper at the rear, it glittered and shone in the sun. It had an imposing array of gadgets on its dashboard, the daintiest little chintz curtains in its windows, and the cleverest contrivances within for the saving of labour and space. In other words it was a miracle of compactness and comfort, and replete, "as per specifications," with every modern convenience. The thought of spending two happy care-free months in so luxurious a vehicle, roaming about the country, far removed from the funkey-ridden courts of officialdom, almost made Saunderson catch his breath with delight. Zulu looked at his shining eyes and smiled.

"Shall we," he asked, "or shall we shan't?"

"We shall," said Saunderson.

They did not spend much time in making preparations for their trek. A leisurely itinerary was planned, a few friends were written to, the caravan was stocked with a supply of food, a stove and a few utensils, and off they started one morning, taking nobody with them except Thambi, Zulu's favourite chauffeur, who also acted as cook, and who slept under the caravan at night.

Gingi, I think, was their first objective, and they spent a couple of thoroughly pleasant days there. Knowing practically nothing of Military Tactics, I cannot tell you to what extent Zulu benefited by observing the defensive and offensive arrangements of the fort. All I can say is that they toiled up innumerable hills and took countless photographs, feeling all the time, no doubt, that they were combining pleasure with instruction. "Something to show old Wilkinson," Zulu would say, unstrapping his camera time and again, "but meanwhile let us enjoy ourselves." And enjoy themselves they did.

The number of hill-forts in South India is legion, and it is no part of my present purpose to give you a detailed account of all the places they visited, all the things they saw, and all the things that happened to them. I shall therefore content myself with suggesting that they had their fair share of adventures. On one occasion, late in the evening, they rounded a curve to see three panthers lying sociably together on a rock by the side of the road. To Saunderson's consternation, Zulu, who was driving at the time, slowed down and stopped, and quite unexpectedly the panthers charged in a body. Saunderson is still not clear

how they got away in the end. One night, Thambi, who, as usual, was sleeping underneath the car, was very nearly carried away by a bear. On another occasion, they were all but run over by a goods train at a level-crossing, managing to get across only in the nick of time. As Saunderson described it later, "it was a matter of inches and our tail-light." On yet another occasion, a culvert collapsed under them, but not before the impetus of their motion had carried them safely to the other side. In one village they passed through, Thambi had the misfortune to knock over a little child. The crowd that gathered, looked extremely ugly, and Saunderson still trembles to think what might not have been done by way of retaliation but for Zulu's tact, persuasiveness and generosity. It was soon after this I think, that with tempers on edge and considerably shaken, they came up with another car, which, though going at a much less speed, persistently refused to make room for them to pass by.

"Get out of the way—" shouted Zulu, but was compelled to close his mouth hastily and omit certain adjectives he had in mind, on account of the dust.

"Let us bump into the blighters from behind" suggested 'Saunderson, guardedly, from beneath

the cover of his hat, which for the last mile and a half he had been using as a dust protector.

It is incredible how in certain situations the veriest trifles are enough to provoke beyond endurance the ugliest of passions in even the most harmless and inoffensive of men. Little wonder then, that both Saunderson and Zulu were presently in a towering rage. But all they could do was to curse and swear alternately as they dodged behind the dust.

“Sacred name of a pipe!” cried Zulu, whose profanity was international, “but I must teach these scoundrels a lesson!”

“Blasted swine!” said Saunderson between his teeth, “wait till I get at them!”

An opportunity came almost immediately. Suddenly Zulu jammed his brakes on hard, for the car ahead had come to a stop at a closed level-crossing, which a turn in the road had hidden from their view. Speechless with suppressed emotions, Saunderson and Zulu watched a dapper over-dressed youth climb out of the driving seat. Turning to the car behind with great deliberation, and looking towards Zulu, whom he no doubt took for the chauffeur, he put up his left hand, raised a finger, and flexed it.

“Come here!” he said.

The sheer, cool, calculated insolence of it took Zulu’s breath away.

“Name of a dog!” he cried “What did you say?”

“Come here!” said the dapper youth flexing his finger again, and if possible with greater coolness.

“Come here yourself, you inflated son of a cow-catcher!” roared Zulu, leaning out of his seat and shaking his fist at the youth. “Come here and I will teach you to obstruct the King’s Highway!”

“Wait a moment and I’ll fetch him” said Saunderson, leaping out on his side, and making for the youth.

“You dare not touch me!” cried the latter, taken aback by Saunderson’s fierce look. “Do you know who I am?”

“I don’t care if you are the Emperor of all the Russias” said Saunderson, adroitly getting hold of the young man by the collar of his coat, and shaking him like a rat. Between breaths he apostrophised his victim, who was howling lustily. “That is for your confounded impertinence—(shake)—That for keeping the bally road to yourself, you baboon—(shake)—That for all the dust we swallowed—(shake)—Say, have you had enough, you

crocodile?—(*shake*)—Or shall I chew your head off for your cheek?—(*shake*)—”

“Yes, yes, yes! No, no, no! O do leave me alone!” whimpered the youth, who seemed after all little more than a boy.

“Let him go, Sandy” said Zulu, who had come up and was watching the proceedings with much amusement. “Let him go. That will about do for to-day, and it ought to learn him not to hold people up on the road, and cheek them afterwards. Here” he continued, turning to the dishevelled youngster, “What do you mean by it, eh?”

“I didn’t mean to cheek you!” said the boy still whimpering, “I am doing this for a bet.”

“O you are, are you?” mimicked Saunderson in the same shrill voice, “Well then, run home to Mammy, and tell her you’ve gone and been and lost it. Off with you, my lad. Skedaddle!”

In the twinkling of an eye, the young fellow had skipped into his seat, started his car, and jerked off through the now open crossing. As he took the corner past the crossing with a sudden swerve, he leaned out and shook his fist at his tormentors.

“I’ll make you pay for this!” he screamed, “See if I don’t.”

Zulu roared with laughter.

“The venomous puppy!” said Saunderson, joining in the laugh.

The laugh, however, was not quite on their side when they came across the following note under Mofussil News in the *Daily Distress*, a copy of which they happened to find a week later in a Railway Refreshment room, where the craving for a civilized lunch had taken them.

ASSAULT ON THE HIGHWAY

Much concern is expressed here at the misadventure that befell the young Jaghirdar of Kumblapet who was attacked yesterday afternoon at the Pambanur level-crossing by two men who lay in wait for him in a lorry. The Jaghirdar, whose courage is well known, was able to beat them off single-handed, but not before sustaining severe injuries. His condition is reported as precarious, and we understand that his uncle Dewan Bahadur N. Bangara Naidu, who is away in Madras, has been wired for. Police inquiries so far have elicited no information concerning the assailants, but a political motive is suspected.

“Read that” said Saunderson tossing the paper over to Zulu, “for a bit of expert lying that ought to take the cake I think.”

“Allah Kareem!” said Zulu, gazing at the note.
“Sandy my boy, we have put our foot in it this time.”

“What do you mean?” asked Saunderson.

“Why, don’t you know? Old Bangara is first cousin to Sir Venkiah Naidu, the Home Member, from whom you expect so much, and if your name is connected with this, it isn’t going to help you to get your job any the quicker.”

“Oh damn!” said Saunderson. “And just as I was beginning to forget things, and enjoy myself too! What had we better do?”

“Beat it!” replied Zulu. “Fresh fields and pastures new, don’t you know? Lie low, till things blow over.”

Poor Saunderson was rotten company for the next week. Gloomy and depressed, he lay about, scowling at Zulu’s jokes and answering in mono-syllables. Old doubts and new fears crowded thick and fast upon him, re-establishing the inferiority complex that the last three weeks had almost eliminated. Zulu’s best efforts to make him sit up and take an intelligent interest in things were unavailing. Gradually, however, under the influence of new sights and the inevitable distractions of the nomad life they led, but chiefly, I suppose, because he found that the level-crossing

incident was not followed by any of the unpleasant sequels he had anticipated, he began to breathe more freely and became more companionable. The reaction, as in all such cases, brought with it a keener interest in life; and a subdued longing for real adventure, supported by an increasing spirit of defiance, became more and more evident.

“Dash it!” said Saunderson one evening, after a long uneventful run, their destination being the old hill-fort of Nandi, “I wish something would happen. Where are the belching dragons and the leagured towns — ?”

“Not to mention the magic casements and the perilous seas!” added Zulu.

“*Helas!*” exclaimed Saunderson, smiting his breast in mock self-pity, “Indeed, the true old times are dead and gone, when every day brought forth a noble chance — ”

“And every chance brought forth a jobless knight! — ” added Zulu laughing. “But you must not forget, dear lad, that the utensil which is subjected to continual scrutiny consistently fails to achieve the point of ebullition.”

“Not to overlook,” supplemented Saunderson, “the undoubted fact, which I came across in a book the other day, that a stone under conditions

of rotary progression is *ipso facto* debarred from vegetable accretions!"

From which you will see that they were both ripe for the adventure into which they rushed slap-bang half an hour later.

It was dusk, and Zulu had just switched on his head-lights. The road which was unfrequented, (they had taken a cross-cut to avoid Bangalore) ran through a belt of lofty trees. The hush of coming night was in the air, and the glamour of the gloaming was in both their hearts. The surface of the road, however, was, I regret to say, not in keeping with this atmosphere of romance. To be perfectly candid, it was bumpy and uneven and full of pot-holes.

"What a jolly little wood," said Saunderson, "Let us stop and camp here for the night."

Zulu indicated the speedometer. "A couple of miles more, for the three thousand" he said, and bumped on. True motorists will no doubt appreciate the unanswerableness of this argument.

It is proper in this connection to pause and reflect on the mysteries of Fate. For, I think I may say that if Saunderson's suggestion had been accepted and acted upon, not only would he have missed the adventure which I am about to relate, but this story would never have been written.

Suddenly, just as the last cipher moved up into its place, the silence of the night was rent by an agonising shriek, followed by others equally, if not more agonising. The next moment, rounding a corner, Zulu screamed his brakes on and avoided by the fraction of an inch the trunk of a palm tree drawn neatly across the road. On the further side, a Ford stood contentedly, but obviously in a similar predicament. They had hardly time to make these things out in the glare of their lights before the screams started again, with redoubled force, seeming to come from barely fifty yards away.

To snatch their pistols and their flash-lights, and to rush in the direction of the shouts was, with Saunderson and Zulu, the work of a moment. To their utter astonishment, however, they could neither hear nor see anything.

"This is certainly the magic wood," said Saunderson, whose mind I suppose was still running on dragons and magicians and three-headed men.

"Rot!" said Zulu, flashing his torch about wildly, and still seeing nothing but the gaunt and silent trees. "Those yells weren't magic. I'll bet my last anna something funny has been happening here. The best thing for us to do is to divide

and search. Sing out if you see anything." And he moved off to the right.

Saunderson was not quite convinced that this was the most discreet thing to do in the circumstances, but there was no time for argument, and moreover, within a few moments he found himself alone. So, taking his bearings, he stepped smartly off in the opposite direction, holding his pistol at the cock in his right hand and brandishing his torch in his left. He had hardly gone a couple of hundred yards in this manner, when he heard a loud groan to his right which brought him up all standing, with his heart in his throat.

"*Aiyoh-o-o-o-o-o-h!* *Aiyoh-o-o-o-o-o-h!*" said somebody again from somewhere near him.

"Who's that?" asked Saunderson, in a queer husky voice, which he failed to recognise as his own, while he flashed his torch about him in every direction. The only answer was a repetition of the groan. Then suddenly the light fell on a little old man who lay trussed and bound at the foot of a huge banyan tree not ten yards to the right of him. With immense relief at the discovery that he had to deal only with human beings after all, he rushed up to the old man, and in a trice had cut the cords that bound him. Raising him up with

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some difficulty, he endeavoured to support the old fellow, who appeared to be a very respectable looking old fellow indeed, and to lead him back to the place where they had left the car. But the latter clung to him piteously.

“My child!” he gasped, “My child! That un-blessed son of a dancing girl has carried away my child!”

“Never mind, my chicken, keep your pecker up!” said Saunderson, more concerned in getting the old man safely back, “We’ll get your child back for you all right. Now come along!”

And so with much pushing and stumbling and dragging, he tried to find his way back to the road. But this was easier said than done. In his excitement at finding the old gentleman, he had lost his sense of direction, and was soon absolutely at a loss to know which way to go. Every tree trunk that his torch revealed looked exactly like every other trunk. Suddenly he heard the noise of shots fired at a considerable distance, and tried shouting to let Zulu know where he was. After a time it occurred to him to fire off a couple of shots himself, but all to no avail. Somehow they stumbled on, the old gentleman, whose circulation was by this time partly restored, being by now the more

anxious of the two to get back. In gasps and jerks and frequent interjections against the son of the dancing girl already mentioned, he told Saunderson the rest of his story. There was not much to it. His name was Ramaraju, and he and his daughter were returning from a day's visit to some relations at Chikballapur, when the tree across the road had compelled them to come to a stop. He had just stepped out of the car to investigate, when they were set upon by half a dozen rascals who had carried him and his daughter into the wood. All that he knew was that, after a time, he was forced to part company from his daughter, who was carried away in another direction. He himself was not carried much further, but left trussed and bound in the condition in which his rescuer had found him. He was perfectly certain that the whole affair had been engineered by a certain young man whose advances towards his daughter he had vehemently repulsed. He ended with fearful maledictions which he called down upon the head of this youth as well as on his chauffeur, whose complicity in the plot he strongly suspected. He even suspected his own daughter's good faith.

Saunderson was, however, more anxious to find his way back, and did not therefore pay much

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attention to the babblings of the old fellow by his side. He understood in a general way that a romantic elopement had been daringly attempted, but more than this his preoccupation in trying to find the way prevented him from grasping. Suddenly, when he least expected it, and after more than an hour of wandering, he found himself stumbling on to the main road. The sense of relief which came over him was, however, immediately dispelled by the thought that he did not know whether he should move up or down it to reach the caravan. Here, however, the old man, who seemed to know the road, came to his help. Confidently he led the way, and in less than half an hour they sighted the lights of the car.

“Heaven be praised!” said Saunderson. “Hallo!” he added, hearing Zulu’s voice in the distance. “Old Zulu is back then. Let us hope, old thing,” he continued, turning to his companion, “that he has brought your daughter back with him.”

The sound of voices brought Zulu to them with a run.

“Sandy, is that you?” he shouted. “Did you find Hallo uncle!” he broke off, seeing the old man.

Saunderson's companion made a curious gulping noise and rushed forward. "Somu!" he cried, "It is Somu! And he has found my daughter!"

"Nantucket!" exclaimed Saunderson, amazed beyond description, "It's the old bean of Nantucket!"

"Nan hasn't," said Zulu, who had heard only the last word, "Not this time anyhow. Come and meet her."

And Saunderson was introduced to the prettiest girl he had ever seen in his life.

It is hardly necessary for me, I think, to linger over the explanations that followed, nor need I go into the details of Zulu's rescue of Sarojini (hitherto referred to as Nan) beyond suggesting that it was performed with due valour and expedition. Within the hour the uncle and the daughter were conveyed to their residence in Bangalore, and Zulu and Saunderson were compelled to accept their hospitality for the night. They left the next day, however, the old man being particularly profuse in his expressions of gratitude to Saunderson.

But somehow or other, I do not know how or why, so far as Saunderson was concerned at least, the zest had gone out of the expedition, and the

wanderlust that had urged him on from place to place seemed suddenly to have died out. In less than a fortnight after the incident in the wood, the tour of the hill-forts of South India was, therefore, by common consent, concluded, and Saunderson was back in Madras worrying about his job.

Jupiter, however, was at this time, I suppose, very much in the ascendant, for, within three days of his return he received a note signed by the Private Secretary of the Home Member, informing him, by direction, that Sir Venkiah would be pleased to see him at his house any time between the hours of Nine and Twelve, the following Saturday, in connection with a vacancy that had occurred in the Excise Department.

You may imagine Saunderson's relief, pleasure, and gratification, when he received this note. You may also imagine the care with which he dressed for the occasion, the fine speeches he thought out, and the assured manner in which he handed his card to the waiting duffadar. But I defy you to imagine his surprise and dismay when, on being ushered into the presence, he found there, the last person he expected to see at the moment, the young Jaghirdar of Kumblapet in pleasant converse with Sir Venkiah, whose relationship to the

young man he suddenly recollected with a sinking heart.

“Good Morning!” said Sir Venkiah, returning Saunderson’s greeting, “Sit down. This is my nephew Kota. Kota, this is Mr. Saunderson who has just returned from Oxford after a brilliant career. But I see you know each other already!”

“We do,” said Kota, whose agitation at seeing Saunderson was the basis for the last remark of the Member’s, “This man is a budmash. It was he who assaulted me the other day,” and he went on to give a highly coloured elaboration of the paragraph that had appeared in the *Daily Distress*, in the recital of which, the part that he himself had played assumed heroic proportions, Saunderson’s actions being not only considerably exaggerated but made to appear correspondingly low, vile, and murderous.

During this recital, Saunderson attempted once or twice to interrupt, but Sir Venkiah simply raised a hand with an irritated look, and the words died on his lips.

“I should hand him over to the Police, immediately,” concluded Kota.

“Of course!” agreed Sir Venkiah, looking sternly at Saunderson, “But leave us alone, for I

want a word with him first." And at a nod from him Kota left the room, hardly able to conceal a smile of triumph as he stole a last glance at Saunderson, who sat on the edge of his chair trembling with indignation and disappointment. He was fast reaching that stage at which even the proverbial worm is supposed to turn.

"I am astonished at your conduct!" said Sir Venkiah, leaning back and fixing his eyes severely on Saunderson, "You, a man of culture and education, behaving like a—a—thug! I sent for you to offer you a very good post that has just fallen vacant, but after what I have just heard concerning you, I suppose you understand that it is out of the question. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing!" said Saunderson rising and speaking doggedly. "Since you choose to believe what that accomplished liar, your nephew, has told you, Sir, there is nothing I could say which would improve the situation. I am sorry to have troubled you, sir. Good Morning!" And he turned and marched towards the door.

"Never mind my chicken, keep your pecker up!"

Saunderson whose hand was already on the knob of the door-handle swung round at these

words to see Sir Venkiah smiling benevolently at him. To say that he was astonished at these familiar words being thus thrown back at him, is to put it mildly. *They were his own words*: but where and when had he used them? Suddenly the recollection flashed on him!

“Come back, and sit down again,” said Sir Venkiah pleasantly, and Saunderson with a dazed look in his eyes obeyed. Already a faint glimmering of the truth was creeping upon him. Sir Venkiah’s next words dispelled all doubt.

“I must congratulate you,” he said, “on your brave rescue of my old friend Ramaraju and his daughter. He gave me a graphic account of it the other day when I met him. As for what Kota said, don’t worry about that. Old Ramaraju told me about that too, from the account that your friend Somayajulu gave him. You were quite right when you called Kota an accomplished liar. He is that and much worse. My only regret is that you didn’t horsewhip him. That is what he really deserves.”

“I am sorry, Sir, that I seemed a bit rude,” said Saunderson, whose feelings at the sudden turn that events had taken may be better imagined than described.

"Not in the least," said Sir Venkiah smiling, "Besides you will require all the rudeness you are capable of to tackle your new job."

"My new job!" exclaimed Saunderson.

"Yes," said Sir Venkiah rising and holding out his hand, "I signed the order of appointment yesterday, and no doubt you will get it in due course. "Good bye!" he added, shaking Saunderson's hand heartily, "You are a lad of spirit, and I wish you the best of luck in the career on which you are starting. Come to tea to-morrow. You will, no doubt, be glad to meet Ramaraju and his daughter again. They have been enquiring about you. My old friend seems to have a fondness for you, and as for Sarojini,—Ah well, girls will be girls!" And to Saunderson's astonishment an unmistakable wink convulsed Sir Venkiah's ponderous features.

Properly speaking, Saunderson's story ought to end here. But a desire for completeness urges me to add what the kind and romantic reader has no doubt divined, that a marriage was soon arranged and took place without undue delay between Saunderson and Sarojini. Zulu, who was back at Oxford, wrote as follows when he heard of it:

Alarums and Excursions

My dear Sandy,

I am jolly glad to hear of your approaching marriage to Sarojini. Heartiest congrats and all that sort of nonsense. Sarojini is a dear good girl, not at all a bad sort, if you know what I mean. I am sure you will hit it off together splendidly. So our caravan trip was not so futile as you thought it was, after all. All's well that ends well, don't you know, as the old bard has put it.

By the way, old Wilkinson is enormously pleased with the snaps we took on our tour, and is certain I am going to get at least a good second in my Schools. I am afraid, however, that he is reckoning without his host. Cheerio, and good luck.

Yours,
ZULU.

As I said, it is not everyone that is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but I rather fancy Saunderson was.





A NOMINAL AFFAIR

If it was not Shakespeare, it was somebody else who asked "What's in a name?" and went on fatuously to point out that a rose would smell just as sweet by any other name. If you should put the same question to me, I would answer without hesitation that there is a great deal in a name. I will not go so far as to say that Mr. Abel Noah Samuel Moses would have smelled any the sweeter, if, say, he had been called Clarence Mannering or Lionel Chester like so many magazine heroes, but I am prepared to maintain that he would have been saved at least one very awkward moment, in which he looked more like a fool

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than ever he did either before or after. It happened, as you will perhaps be interested to hear, in the following manner.

In his own town of Gondipatla, Mr. Moses was a man of considerable importance. When I say that he was President of the Gondipatla Taluk Board, and sole proprietor of the Gondipatla Sawmills, and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Muthumeenakshi Bank, Ltd., I think you will get a fair idea of the position he held in Gondipatla and the influence he wielded. In Madras, however, he was a nobody. He walked about the streets, and no one took any notice of him there, far less made humble namaskarams to him in the manner to which he was accustomed in Gondipatla; he raced along in buses, and not a soul seemed to care whether he was there or not. He went into the most crowded places and felt desperately lonely and miserable. No wonder then, that on the evening of the second day of his stay in Madras he came to the conclusion that the metropolis did not agree with him. And I am pretty sure that he would have returned to Gondipatla immediately, but for the business which had brought him from there. The nature of this business need not detain us here, for it has no

connection with my story; but it necessitated his stay in Madras for three days more; which, as you will see, was unfortunate for him from more points than one.

Into the gloom that enveloped the spirit of Mr. Moses, one gleam of light, however, found its way. He was walking dejectedly along the Marina on the evening of the third day of his visit, when hearing quick steps, and a "Hallo!" from behind him, he turned to see a tall stranger holding out a purse to him, which, with a sudden catch at the breast pocket of his coat, he saw was his own.

"You dropped this," said the tall stranger coming up, "I was lucky enough to pick it up" and he handed the purse to Mr. Moses with a smile. The latter received it back with profuse expressions of gratitude, and satisfied himself that nothing had fallen out of it. "Thank you, thank you," he said again, "I am extremely obliged to you."

The stranger waved away his thanks with a deprecatory gesture. "Please don't mention it" he said, "It is nothing. I am glad I happened to be behind. No service at all I assure you." And he fell into step with Mr. Moses.

To Mr. Moses the company of the stranger was most welcome, as you may easily imagine. His heart overflowed with generous and kindly sentiments to this man who had restored to him his purse, which contained not only some very important letters but also nearly three hundred rupees in notes and change. Moreover, his loneliness and vexation had reached such a pitch that he would have been grateful, I think, for anybody's company at the time. He showed himself therefore particularly pleased with his new-found friend, whom he discovered to be a person of a most genial and cheerful temperament. In the course of conversation he learned from him that his name was Swaminatha Mudaliar, that he had travelled extensively in Europe, and that he too had, on the present occasion, come up from the mofussil on business, which it seemed lay in diamonds. Mr. Moses, who was impressed, returned confidence with confidence, and soon there was little that Mr. Mudaliar did not know regarding him or his affairs. When they parted late in the evening they had arranged to meet again on the Marina the next day, opposite Queen Mary's College, and Mr. Moses felt not only that he had made an excellent and valuable friend, but

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also that the world was really not such a dull or stupid place after all.

The next evening Mr. Moses went to the Marina at four o'clock, but though he walked about, and up and down, for full three hours in front of the College, and kept a shrewd watch all the time, not a sign did he see of his friend. I need hardly say that he was greatly puzzled and disappointed. With renewed hope, he repeated his performance the next day also, but with no more success. On the day following, he left Madras greatly pleased, you may be sure, at effecting his escape from the hateful city.

Now, my story is really concerned with what happened to Mr. Moses during his journey back to Gondipatla, though what I have already set down is, you will soon realise, not unconnected with what occurred later. I must therefore take you to the Central Station, on the particular evening on which Mr. Moses had arranged to leave the metropolis. We will not, of course, emulate the example of our friend who belonged to that school of train-catchers which believes in camping on the platform at least four hours earlier than the time at which the train is scheduled for departure. We will get there with just about ten minutes to

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spare, and look in on Mr. Moses, now comfortably seated in his second-class compartment, and turning over the pages of *The Hindu*, in search of the sheet devoted to provincial news, in which he hoped to read something about Gondipatla affairs. He has spread his bedding neatly on the opposite berth; his Gladstone bag bearing his initials in large white letters reposes comfortably on it, and beside it lies his white pith-hat. I dare say you are impressed by that bag with its appearance of solid respectability. You would be much more impressed, I am sure, if you knew that it contained over ten thousand rupees in notes, not to mention certain very valuable papers, connected with the bank over which Mr. Moses presided with so much grace and dignity.

Mr. Moses is the only one in his compartment. Indeed the train is running almost empty to-night, and what is even more unusual there is absolutely no bustle on the platform.

At three minutes to the time, however, hearing a slight commotion outside, Mr. Moses put his head out of the window and saw a man come running up, carrying a roll of bedding and a small leather bag in one hand, and a silver vessel in the other. It is no other than Mr. Swaminatha Mudaliar,

and you can observe the mingled pleasure and astonishment on the face of Mr. Moses on recognising his friend of the marina. They saw each other almost at the same moment and their surprise and gladness were mutual.

“Hallo,” said Mr. Swaminatha Mudaliar stopping still and looking amazed, “What, you going too? This is a pleasure! No time to talk now,” he added, as the guard blew his whistle; and forthwith, he bundled his belongings in through the door which Mr. Moses held obligingly open for him. He had hardly dropped into a corner with a sigh before the train moved.

“Almost missed it!” exclaimed Mr. Mudaliar mopping his brow with a large silk handkerchief. “But what a piece of luck, your going along too to-day. Look here,” he continued, “I must apologise to you for not meeting you on the marina that day as I promised. I simply couldn’t, you know. At the last moment, business detained me.” And he tapped the leather bag by his side, and smiled significantly.

Mr. Moses who had been burning to ask him about his failure to keep his promise, and who was now perfectly satisfied with the explanation given, turned his gaze for the first time in the direction

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of the bag, and what he saw made him start. For there, upon it, in letters almost as large as those on his bag, he read his own initials.

"You have got my initials on your bag," he said, showing his surprise.

"Have I?" asked Mr. Mudaliar looking at his bag. "Are they yours too then? Ha! Ha! What a strange coincidence! A serviceable old thing, though" he went on, "It is not so new as yours which I see over there, but must take great care of it all the same. Very precious just now. Contains, I don't mind telling *you*, more than fifty thousand rupees worth of diamonds." And he patted his bag affectionately and nodded.

Mr. Moses was overawed, and thinking of the paltry ten thousand rupees in his bag, felt insignificant. He did not show it however, but entered cheerfully into conversation with his friend, who was as engaging and delightful as ever. It was in the middle of one of his racy stories racily told, of a third cousin, who (true enough in all probability) had found his way into jail in circumstances of a peculiarly interesting nature, that they felt the train which was going at full speed at the time, suddenly slow down and come to a dead stop.

"Hallo! That looks as though somebody had pulled the chain" said Mr. Mudaliar putting his head out of the window. "No," he added drawing it in again, "It is only a signal. Line not clear, I suppose." As he ceased speaking, the train began to move gently on once more.

Mention of the chain had touched a chord in Mr. Moses's mind which stirred him almost to his depths. Wistfully he looked up at the communication cord and the lyrical notice above it, which was as familiar to him as household words. Indeed, to pull the chain and stop the train—penalty for improper use Rs. 50—had been with him an ambition from childhood. Little did he know how soon that ambition was to be realised. Almost timidly he enquired of his friend whether he had ever seen it done.

"Seen it!" said Mr. Mudaliar, "Dozens of times! Why I have done it myself twice. Once for a hundred rupee wager which a fellow-passenger was fool enough to lay with me, and, on another occasion, when I noticed a child fall accidentally out of the train."

"What happened to the child?" asked Mr. Moses with breathless interest, "Was it killed?"

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“No. By the greatest piece of good luck, it fell on a bundle of straw which someone had thrown by the line, and escaped without even a scratch. It was most miraculous.”

“Indeed it was” said Mr. Moses heaving a great sigh of relief.

On the subject of stopping trains by pulling the communication cord, Mr. Mudaliar proved delightfully informative. He had the most interesting stories of sudden stoppages, and thrilled Mr. Moses with his graphic accounts of them, so much so that it was nearly 12-30 when they thought of going to sleep.

“ Didn’t think it was so late” said Mr. Mudaliar consulting his watch with one hand, and hiding an enormous yawn with the other. “ Time we went to bed. Let us have something to drink, however, before we do so. I have some hot milk in that vessel there. You will have some, I hope.”

In true Indian fashion, Mr. Moses politely declined, but his friend would take no refusal. Unscrewing the top of the vessel, he drew out a silver tumbler and filling it with the milk he offered it to Mr. Moses, who took it with a “ Thank you very much,” and drank it off. He thought the milk tasted very good, and said so, and was

prevailed upon to consume another cupful. Mr. Mudaliar himself required no cup, but merely tilted the vessel to within an inch of his lips and so satisfied his thirst. Then he washed the cup from which Mr. Moses had drunk, screwed it on again, put it away, and spread his bedding, disposing his leather bag so as to form a pillow for his head. Then locking the two doors of the compartment, with a smiling "good night" he switched off the lights and laid himself down.

Mr. Moses who, meanwhile, had done the same, and who by now was feeling extremely sleepy, thought how lucky he was to be in the company of such a careful man. It would never have occurred to him, for instance, to lock the doors. Feeling with one of his hands to assure himself that his bag was within reach and safely lodged, he smiled happily and fell immediately into a deep sleep, in which he dreamt many exciting dreams of trains being held up at dead of night by armed robbers, and of himself performing unheard of feats of strength and swiftness and valour.

For three quarters of an hour there was perfect stillness in the compartment, while the train rattled on its way. Then, if you had been there, you would have seen Mr. Swaminatha Mudaliar rise

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stealthily from his berth, and bend over Mr. Moses. Satisfied that he was asleep he smiled a smile of great contentment, and drawing himself up rubbed his hands together.

“Two cups of milk,” he muttered, “The draught is working well. The booby!” He went, next, to the window, and taking out a pocket torch, looked at his watch. “Just do it nicely,” he said to himself. Leaning out of the window, and looking down the train, he flashed his torch three times and was relieved to see three answering flashes from a window two compartments away. “Splendid,” he murmured, “Gurunath is ready. Now to get things ready for him.” With this, he went to Mr. Moses again and gently searched his pockets for his keys, and having found them, carefully drew the Gladstone bag from under the seat and set it on his bed. By its side he placed his own leather bag. Opening both he quickly transferred the contents of the one into the other, and finally with one end of a length of short rope, tied the handles of the two bags together. He then detached the key of the Gladstone bag from the others on the ring, and restored the latter to the pockets of Mr. Moses. Having done this he went back to the window and looked out. He seemed to be

watching for some landmark, which presently coming into view, he flashed his torch again three times, and was again answered by three flashes from his assistant. This second signal evidently meant that everything was ready. A few seconds, and Mr. Mudaliar felt the fast rushing train suddenly slacken speed, and come grindingly to a stop. In less than the twinkling of an eye, he had lowered the bags out of the window, into the hands of Gurunath, who, not waiting to hear his master's whispered "Look to it—be quick" immediately shouldered them, and bolted into a belt of trees by the line. Then he stepped swiftly back to his bed and covering himself up with his sheet fell fast asleep. Had he been a second longer at the window, he would have seen a man step down from the compartment next to the one Gurunath had occupied, and follow him into the belt of trees.

There was the usual delay, during which the guard and the driver made a carriage to carriage inspection, and at last discovered that the chain had been pulled in a compartment which they found quite empty. They cursed and swore at being baffled in their search.

"Bloody well looks as if somebody has been playing us a bloody trick," said the guard

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disgustedly, and the driver agreed in an equally sanguinary manner. After which they proceeded each to his own business with more curses at the delay, and the train moved on again.

I wish to hurry over the next five hours, and come to the awakening of Mr. Moses. It happened suddenly and under dramatic circumstances. He was dreaming at the time, of running with all his might to catch up with a train he had missed, closely pursued by the station master; almost as he came up with it, he felt the latter clutch him by his shoulder and drag him back. The shock of it was so rude that he awoke,—to find Mr. Mudaliar shaking him by his shoulder, and shrieking at him with his face distorted by passion, “Villain! Where are my diamonds? You have stolen my bag!”

Mr. Moses was too dazed for a moment to comprehend. He looked blankly at his interlocutor, who rang the changes on his question in a shrill excited voice of seemingly uncontrolled anger. “Villain! Villain!” he yelled, “Where is my bag?—You have stolen my diamonds!”

Suddenly Mr. Moses seemed to understand, and a great fear clutched at his heart. He looked and felt for his bag, and realised that it was not there. Thrusting Mr. Mudaliar aside, he leapt up with a

cry as of an animal in pain. "My bag!" he screamed, "It is gone! All my money—everything—aiyo, aiyayo—help!—murder!—thieves!—"

"Stop that!" shouted Mr. Mudaliar, "Stop it, you rascal!" and he clapped his hand over the lips of Mr. Moses and forced him back on his berth. "You have stolen my diamonds," he hissed, "and now you pretend you have been robbed yourself. Come, out with it, or I will choke the life out of you on the spot!" And suiting his actions to his words, he gripped Mr. Moses's throat, and rolled his eyes dreadfully. Mr. Moses thought his last moment had come, and his heart stood still with terror. Suddenly he realised that the man must be mad, and fear gave him a strength which he did not possess. With one mighty, almost superhuman, effort he wrenched his opponent's fingers away from his throat and leapt at the communication cord, which he tugged so violently that the chain broke and came away in his hands. For one terrible moment he thought he had failed, but life flowed back into him when he felt the train slowing down in response. Then he faced round to see why his enemy had not followed up his attack. To his astonishment he saw him sitting quietly in the far corner, with his head

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thrust out of the window. The man was certainly stark staring mad.

What happened next is easily related. The train came to a stop with a sudden grinding of brakes. Almost before it had done so, Mr. Mudaliar was out of the compartment and running up the line to meet the guard and the driver, to whom in very violent language and with many violent gesticulations he complained of the loss of his diamonds. He ended by accusing his fellow-passenger of the theft of his two leather bags, and led the guard back to his compartment, giving him a graphic account of what, according to him, had happened.

“Guard,” said Mr. Moses in a trembling tone, as soon as he was within speaking distance, “Take care, that man is mad! He attacked and nearly killed me just now.”

“Serves you right,” said that officer whose muddled wits could only grasp one set of facts at a time, and who moreover had not caught the first half of what Mr. Moses had said, “Serve you right, if you done what you did. Gentleman says you stole his luggage and his diamonds!” The last part of this sentence was intended as much for Mr. Moses as for the eager crowd of passengers who were pressing round him for information. Dawn was just breaking.

“No, No,” cried Mr. Moses wringing his hands, “it is all wrong. My bag too has been stolen! Ten thousand rupees gone!—”

“Your bag?” interrupted Mr. Mudaliar looking with angry scorn at him, “You never had any bag. Officer,” he said, turning to the guard, “he is lying for all he is worth to save himself. He hadn’t a scrap of luggage except a roll of bedding.”

The guard was rather puzzled and showed it. He took off his hat and scratched his head. Finally, he climbed into the compartment and made an inspection. “Can’t make anything of it,” he said at last. “Anyhow can’t do anything now. We will report matter to the police at Donapur. Get there in half an hour,” he added, unfurling his green flag and giving the signal for the train to move on.

At Donapur, which is a large and important junction, the matter was in the first instance reported to the station master. The preliminary enquiry which that worthy conducted on the platform itself, resulted in nothing. Both Mr. Mudaliar and Mr. Moses persisted in their statements, the former still accusing the latter, and crying down the most terrible maledictions on him. Mr. Moses looked very dejected and miserable, not knowing what to make of it all.

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Suddenly as the station master was consulting with the guard in a whisper as to what next to do, in roared the Teppumaliam Mail. From a carriage which came to a standstill a few yards from them stepped briskly out a thin wiry little man carrying two bags. Seeing the little group in front of him, he approached smiling. Mr. Mudaliar was the first to perceive him, and thought the game was up. His first impulse was to make a bolt for it, but a moment's thought showed him that it would be useless. He therefore decided to put a bold face on the matter.

"My bags, my diamonds!" he cried, rushing up to the stranger and almost embracing him.

"Ha!" said the latter, who was obviously a police inspector in plain clothes, "So they are yours then?"

"Yes," said Mr. Mudaliar, "Don't you see my initials on them?" It was at this moment that Mr. Moses rushed up and claimed his Gladstone bag which he had just spotted.

"Now then, steady there," said the inspector to Mr. Moses looking him up and down curiously. "Ha, ha, the accomplice! So this is your bag, is it? You thought yourself very clever, didn't you? Well I am going to give you something, but not quite what you expect. Here you are then!" There

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was a click, and Mr. Moses to his horror found his wrists manacled by a pair of handcuffs.

“That’s right, inspector” said Mr. Mudaliar tenderly caressing the two bags which the former had placed on the ground, “That’s right! I don’t know how you found it out, but you’re perfectly right. I have been telling these gentlemen the same thing for the last half hour, but they would not believe me.” And he went forward and took the inspector’s hand and shook it vigorously.

“No, no, no,” cried Mr. Moses, now almost ready to weep. “I am not the man, and I didn’t steal anything, and that is my bag. It is all a plot. It is all a plot.”

“Your bag?” said the inspector, “Come, come. It is no use going further with it. Don’t you see that the game is up?”

“But it is mine,” shrilled Mr. Moses, pointing to his bag. “Don’t you see my initials on it—A. N. S. M.? Those are my initials.”

“Ha ha,” laughed Mr. Mudaliar, “How boldly he lies! Inspector,” he continued, turning to him, “you can see for yourself that both bags are mine. My initials are on both of them. My name is A. N. Swaminatha Mudaliar, Adur Narasimha Swaminatha Mudaliar, if you wish to

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ound have it in full. I am a trader in diamonds well-known in this place, and if you give me time I ~~will~~ can prove to you that I am a man of position and ~~for~~ respectability. As for that miserable looking ! I ~~do~~ wretch there, you have made it quite clear that he ~~per~~ is guilty of the theft. But still since he claims the ~~ne~~ bag, let us give him fair play. If it is his, he ought ~~y~~ ~~to~~ be able to prove it. Let us first of all find out ~~an~~ ~~what~~ his name is."

ly. "Come, what is your name?" asked the ~~inspec~~ ~~v~~ alitor, facing Mr. Moses sternly. In his mind there ~~I~~ ~~was~~ no doubt at all. Feeling himself master of the ~~is~~ situation he glanced importantly at the crowd which had gathered round the little group, for the ~~e~~ ~~carrest~~ had created a great sensation. "What is ~~you~~ your name?" he repeated, even more sternly.

The conflict of emotions in Mr. Moses's heart ~~point~~ made it difficult for him to speak. Even to articulate ~~is~~ his name seemed at the moment impossible.

"Abel—Noah—Samuel—Moses," he managed ~~w~~ ~~to~~ utter at last; and as he said it there was first a ~~n~~itter, and then a shout of laughter went up from ~~th~~ the bystanders. Even the inspector smiled.

"That will do," he said, with a didn't-I-tell-you-~~o~~ air. "Your powers of invention do you credit. ~~w~~ Come along! Anything else you may have to

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reveal to us we will hear when we get to the police station."

You can easily imagine what happened there. Mr. Mudaliar had no difficulty at all in proving that the Gladstone bag which Mr. Moses still claimed, belonged to him. Defying the latter to produce its key, he produced it triumphantly himself and unlocked the bag. Mr. Moses looked on, stunned, almost petrified with amazement, as the open bag disclosed not a thing which belonged to him. One by one Mr. Mudaliar took the contents out, a novel with his name on it, marked clothes, a writing case, . . . and finally, a case of cards each of which had his full name printed on it.

It never occurred to the astute inspector to look into the other bag. Instead, with an air of conscious triumph he detailed the manner in which he had managed to recover the stolen bags. He had, he said, spotted a notorious burglar, whom the police had been wanting for some time, on the platform of the Central Station the night before, and suspecting that something was up, had travelled by the train in a compartment adjacent to the one which the man himself occupied. At about 2 a.m. he had seen him flash certain signals to an

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accomplice in another compartment, after which the train suddenly came to a stop. The man had then gone up to his accomplice and received two bags from him, and made off into the woods. He went after him, but the fellow finding himself followed, set off running; he was hampered, however, by the bags, and when he found he was being overtaken had let the bags fall and sought safety in flight. Having secured the bags, he decided that it was useless to follow up the man, but he had made his way back to the railway line to find that the train had gone. In a short time, however, he heard the rumble of another train, and realised that this was the second mail, the Teppumaliam express. Luckily his torch had a red slide to it, and hoping against hope he had waved it in front of the oncoming train; fortunately for him the driver had seen the spot of crimson light and pulled up. And there he was. That was all he had to tell. He had lost his man but he had discovered the bags. He considered himself very lucky.

Mr. Mudaliar was profuse in his gratitude, and assured the inspector that his splendid achievement should not go unrewarded. He would certainly write that very day to a brother-in-law of his cousin who was a great friend of the personal clerk

of a member of the Executive Council and see that the proper thing was done.

"At least a Rao Sahib," he said, and again shook the inspector's hand warmly.

And so, after a few more formalities were over, Mr. Mudaliar went blithely from under the very nose of the inspector, who little suspected what an arch-villain he was allowing to escape through his hands. "What luck!" the former was happily saying to himself. "Defeat turned into victory at the last moment! Must be more careful next time, however, that my artistic leanings don't lead me astray. Wonder where Gurunath will meet me."

As for Mr. Moses he spent two days in custody, enduring the bitter taunts and cruel sneers of the constables. It was not till the third day that he was able to prove his identity to the satisfaction of the police authorities, whose feelings in the matter when they realised how they had been duped, will not enter into. Suffice it to say that Mr. Moses returned to Gondipatla a very much sadder, poorer, and wiser man.

It was exactly a week later that he received at his Gondipatla address, a letter which he perused with mingled feelings. The writer deeply regretted

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the pain and discomfort which he had been forced to inflict on Mr. Moses, but advised him henceforward to be more careful in his chance friendships, and not to carry such large sums of money with him when next he travelled, or on his person, during his walks. There had been no difficulty whatever, he confessed, in extracting Mr. Moses's purse from his pocket on that memorable day on the Marina, and the writer thought that perhaps a flap and a button might lend greater security to an otherwise unprotected pocket. The letter closed respectfully with the suggestion that Mr. Moses should change his name, or at least a part of it, if possible. At the foot of this interesting communication stood the letters A. N. S. M.





IT MEANS LUCK

I have never had much patience with the people (and they are legion) whose faith in Astrology is fostered at the expense of every rational sentiment and whose belief in predestination has crushed out every particle of faith in themselves. The reason is, I suppose, partly that I have never been able to bring myself to suffer a fool gladly, and partly that I cannot conceive a sane mind admitting the possibility of a pre-determined order of things in human lives capable of being scientifically foretold from a scrutiny of the heavens. No doubt you think this is a heresy, and a heresy of a particularly irritating type, but let me hasten to say that

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these are opinions which I once held, but hold no longer. What happened the other day has made me realise that there are indeed more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy. The fact is, I cannot any longer believe that the stars in their courses have altogether no influence on the destiny, here below, of human lives.

My conversion, if conversion it can be called, was brought about through the agency of Rao Sahib Boothalinga Modeliar. I have no notion whether you know the Rao Sahib, but you are bound to have met him, or at least to have heard of him, if good fortune has ever brought you to ~~the~~ Gelmara. In case, however, this good luck should not have been yours, let me give you a general idea of one of our leading residents. He is a tubby little man, whose habitual long coat, fierce bushy eye-brows and moustaches, and watery eyes, give him a combined and contradictory air of meekness and ferocity comical in the extreme. His lace turban, which is either a bright green, or a brighter red, renders him conspicuous wherever he goes, and indeed there is nothing he likes so much as to be noticed. In spite, however, of an obvious air of self-importance, and a tendency sometimes to talk

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big, the Rao Sahib is well known for his kind heart and his generous charities. All Gelmar knows, moreover, that they could not possibly have had a more efficient or a more honest Public Prosecutor, a post which he held for twenty-seven years, and from which he retired, with honours, only the other day. When I add that he is a bachelor of confirmed orthodoxy with an almost pathetic belief in Astrology, that he lives in a big house on the outskirts of the town, and that his most cherished possessions are a faithful servant, a telescope, and a parrot, you will have as complete a knowledge of the man and his circumstances as the full appreciation of this little story renders necessary.

A word, however, about these curious possessions, which probably puzzle you. Punja, his servant, had been with him for more years than he cared to remember, and was an indispensable part of his household economy. His brass telescope with which he cultivated his interest in Astronomy (a consuming hobby) and pandered to his passion for Astrology, was a high-powered instrument of imposing appearance, especially when set up on its tripod. And as for the parrot, which answered to the name of Coca and swore like a drunken sergeant, that had been left as a legacy to him

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by a former Collector on his transfer from the District.

The other evening, Viswanath and I (Viswanath is our Munsiff and we share a house), having nothing better to do, paid a call upon the Rao Sahib. It was nearly dusk, though quite light yet, and we found the old man sitting out in his garden reading, with Coca perched as grave as death in a wire cage on a table by his side, and the inevitable telescope on its legs a little distance away. The Rao Sahib has a trick of hospitality which goes straight to the heart, and in no time we were comfortably seated by him sipping from glasses of cool lemon squash.

"Coca looks very serious to-day," I said, after the usual generalities about the weather and the crops.

"Oh yes!" said Boothalinga Modeliar, "I think the rascal has shouted himself hoarse. He has been saying the most astonishingly wicked things all this afternoon."

"It means luck!" announced the parrot suddenly, so suddenly indeed and in so hoarse a tone that it made us start.

"What means luck?" I asked, leaning forward and looking into the bird's half-hooded eyes.

"Go to hell!" screeched Coca, "Damn you! - Go to hell! Go—to—hell!—"

“Now then!” interrupted old Boothalinga, “don’t be rude, Coca. Shut up, you old devil, or I will take you inside. Shut up!”

“Shut up!” retorted Coca, but forthwith relapsed into silence.

“An extraordinary bird that!” I said. “Never seen anything like it in my life before.”

“Yes,” said Boothalinga, “he is wonderful, isn’t he? And he grows more so every day. I have had him now for seven years; as it happens, it is exactly seven years to-day. He was given to me, you know, by Mr. Harrison—the one who is now Board Member—when he left the district or transfer. How well I remember the occasion!” And the old man stopped and sighed.

Viswanath and I exchanged glances, for we had heard the account of this transfer of property many many times.

“It was at a tea party given by me in his honour,” continued our host, “the day before he left us, that he called me to him. ‘Boothalinga he said, he always called me that, you know, we were very friendly, ‘Boothalinga, there is a little thing I want to put into your charge before I leave. I want you to keep it as a small token of my esteem and regard for you. No, don’t ask me

what it is,' he went on, seeing the eager look of enquiry in my eyes, 'I will send it over to-morrow in the morning before I go. Promise me that you will take care of it.' I promised faithfully, and what should come next day but this bird, with a very kind letter from Mr. Harrison explaining its peculiarities and giving details concerning its food."

"And you have had it ever since?" asked Viswanath, trying to hide a smile.

"Ever since," was the reply. "And I think I may say that Coca brought luck with him, because as you know it was in that year that they conferred my title on me."

"Splendid!" I said, more because I felt something was expected of me than because of anything else.

"It took me some time to get accustomed to his ways," continued Boothalinga, "but we soon became fast friends, and now—now I don't know what I should do without him. Why, apart from the company he provides, he is better than ten mastiffs. Do you know where he sleeps? Upon the safe in my room! And he screeches blue murder at the slightest untoward noise or disturbance. Just now," he added carelessly, "he has to be particularly

careful, for there is a clear ten thousand rupees in the safe, which my tenants brought in this morning. And then there are the family jewels."

We affected to be suitably impressed by this sudden revelation of wealth.

"Really!" I said. "It is indeed a very valuable bird."

"Very!" assented Viswanath, who had this amusing trick of emphatic confirmation of even the most idle statements.

It had become dark by now. Above us the glorious heavens sparkled with the radiance of a myriad suns. The familiar constellations were particularly brilliant. Cassiopeia wheeled about our shoulders; behind us Scorpio hung in the air like a kite with a long tail, while before us Orion in all his glory had awakened from his slumbers and was even now setting one foot over the Dakri Hill. Boothalinga, however, was more interested in the planets.

"There is Jupiter!" he said suddenly. "And there is Saturn!" he went on. "And that red one over there is Mars. What a glorious thing it is to feel that our destinies are guided by these heavenly bodies, and that our actions are influenced by their movements and conjunctions! It makes you feel one with the whole Universe, does it not?"

“Does it?” I asked, a little doubtfully.

“Of course!” said Boothalinga, “Of course! Why, don’t you believe in Astrology?”

I was saved from a confession of honest doubt by the timely intervention of Punja who came to tell his master that somebody wished to see him.

“Ah, that must be my astrologer!” said our host rising. “I asked him to come this evening, for there are some important things I wish to discuss with him. Vaidynatha Pattar is the finest astrologer in South India. Astronomical predictions are not more accurate than his forecasts of human events. Would you care to stay and see him?”

We hastened to excuse ourselves.

“Well then,” said Boothalinga, “come over and have tea with me to-morrow afternoon at 4 o’clock. I am giving a small party and I should be very glad to have you both. Besides, if the conditions are favourable, I shall be able to show you a very interesting astronomical phenomenon—the transit of the planet Mercury over the face of the sun. With the help of my telescope I hope to see it very clearly. It has its astrological significance too, but that, the astrologer has still to explain to me. You will come, won’t you? You must!”

We murmured our thanks, and, returning the hearty grip of our friend, left him to his parrot and his astrologer.

"What a queer old fellow!" I said. "He and that bird of his go very well together."

"Very!" said Viswanath.

"Have you seen the transit of Mercury?" I enquired. "I believe it is rather an unusual affair."

"Oh, very!" replied Viswanath, "I wouldn't miss to-morrow's party for the world. By the way," he added, stopping suddenly, "I think I left my stick there."

"You are always leaving your stick about somewhere!" I said. "Come on! You can get it back to-morrow."

The stick, however, was returned that very night. Punja brought it to us when we were sitting on the verandah, after dinner.

"Say many salaams to your master," said Viswanath, "it is very kind of him."

"Is the astrologer gone, Punja?" I asked.

"No Sir," said Punja. "He staying the night. Going only to-morrow morning. He tell master good luck coming. Plenty good luck. Then he say 'Bad luck too. Little bad luck. But

plenty favour from the ruling classes.' Master very pleased."

"I have no doubt he is" I said, "Very well, Punja. We'll see to-morrow." And Punja withdrew, with profound salaams.

"These fellows are all of a piece!" exclaimed Viswanath. "They never commit themselves, with their good luck and their bad luck!"

"Not to mention," I added, "the favour of the ruling classes. I like that bit best."

At 4 o'clock on the afternoon of the next day, we were again at the house of the Rao Sahib. Most of the guests had already arrived. It was a small and very select party, three or four of the better known residents of the town, and about half a dozen of the leading officials.

"Old Boothalinga is doing us well!" I remarked to Rangiah the Sub-Judge, who faced me across the little table at which we sat down.

"Isn't he?" said Rangiah. "Look at the funny way he waddles about. Now then, he is coming our way!"

Boothalinga approached our table balancing a plate of sandwiches in one hand and a silver salver containing cakes of many hues in the other.

“Hallo!” he said, perceiving us, “there you are! I was on the look out for you. The transit begins at 4. 22. Have a cake. They are very good. Specially made and sent from Madras.”

I could not be so discourteous as to refuse a cake “specially made and sent from Madras.” So I took one.

“What a beautiful silver plate this is!” said Viswanath as he helped himself in turn. “Where did you get it?”

“Yes. It is a beauty, isn’t it?” said Boothalinga. “I had it specially made. It is a new process, you know,—very beautiful!” and he passed on.

Suddenly we heard a shout of laughter from the other end of the room, and in the middle of it a hoarse voice.

“Peg lao!” it said, “Jeldee! It means luck!”

“That is Coca at his tricks again,” I said.

“Damn you!—” screeched Coca; “It means luck!—Jeldee! Jeldee!—”

“A most wonderful bird that!” said Rangiah. “Very clear!”

“Do you know,” I said leaning over, “Boothalinga is going to have the most wonderful luck this afternoon.”

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“Luck!” said Rangiah, “Going to have! How do you know?”

“His astrologer told him so last night.” I replied.

“Go to Hell!” screamed the parrot. “Jeldee! It means luck!” And there was another shout of laughter.

“These astrologers,” said Rangiah, “are the very devil. And that bird by its language seems to hail from the same place.”

“We shall see!” I said, taking a cigar from the box held out by Punja dressed in a fine new coat and a resplendent turban almost as wonderful as his master’s.

Presently we moved out on to the lawn in front of the house, where cane chairs and tables had been set under a tree. In one corner trained upon the sun stood the telescope in all its glory. We took our seats. Boothalinga went up to his instrument, and, after a few minutes of adjustment, turned to us with a radiant smile.

“In another five minutes,” he announced, looking at his watch, “the transit will begin. In the meantime I may tell you that the phenomenon we are just about to witness is one of extraordinary interest. Mercury, as you all know, is the smallest

major planet and the nearest to the sun, its proximity to which makes the telescopic study of its physical constitution extremely difficult. Just now we are about to see it pass over the disc of the sun. As the transit will take nearly two hours we need be in no hurry. We can all see it at our leisure. These transits I should inform you are generally repeated in a cycle of 46 years, the interval between transits being sometimes three, sometimes ten, sometimes thirteen years. The next one, for instance, will not be till 1940."

He stopped and applied his eye again to the telescope.

"It has started!" he cried, in great exultation,
"It has started!"

I must confess that this announcement gave us all a thrill. Some of us left our seats to strain our eyes at the sun, which so far as I could see looked just the same. Others crowded round the telescope. One by one they satisfied their curiosity. When it came to my turn I found the greatest difficulty in directing the telescope correctly. The sun it seemed (so Boothalinga explained) had moved out of the field of vision within the short time I had taken to change places with the last observer. After what appeared an infinity of adjustment, however, I was

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successful, and slowly the edge of the sun, snow-white against the surrounding darkness, flashed into view. Then laboriously sweeping its surface from end to end and from top to bottom, I lighted on a dark spot. This, I supposed, was Mercury silhouetted against the sun. I was trying to realise the tremendous implications of this fact when I heard the scream of the parrot, and then just behind me its raucous voice.

“It means luck!” it said, “Luck! Luck! Luck!”

Silently I gave place to Viswanath who had been waiting his turn by my side.

So the evening wore on. Some of the guests settled down to bridge. Others looked at the sun through coloured glasses and from time to time notified the progress the transit was making. Boothalinga occupied himself at the telescope with taking photographs of the sun, and generally keeping an eye on the phenomenon.

“It is over!” he announced at last. “They say that seeing the transit through is lucky. I hope it may bring you all good luck.”

“Luck!” screeched the parrot, flying over and perching on the end of the telescope, “Luck! — Luck! — Jeldee Luck!”

It was almost as though this had been a signal, for simultaneously loud cries were heard from the house and we turned to see Punja come running from inside shouting at the top of his voice, "Rogues! — Thieves! — Gone! — Aiyoh! Aiyoh!"

"Stop it!" said Boothalinga sternly. "What is the matter?"

"Gone!" repeated Punja, "Everything gone! The safe is open, and they have stolen everything!"

You can imagine the sensation this information created. We were all on our feet, and Boothalinga, poor fellow, gone grey with apprehension, was making for the house as quickly as he could go, followed by Cariappa, the Superintendent of Police, who happened to be one of the guests present. We stood about awkwardly, hoping for the best. Presently Cariappa came out alone looking very anxious.

"It is quite true," he said. "The safe has been rifled. It contained, according to Boothalinga, about 5,000 rupees in cash and some thousands of rupees worth of jewels, the famous Bapatla rubies which are heirlooms in his family. The poor fellow is in a state of collapse. It is better not to

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disturb him now." "I shall remain here," he added, "to see to things."

This was a pretty significant hint that we were not needed. All of us therefore departed silently, meditating on this blow Fate had dealt the Rao Sahib so suddenly and so unexpectedly.

"The Gods," I said, "strike swiftly and strike hard."

"Very!" said Viswanath. "See!" he continued pointing to the telescope as we were leaving the place, "there is that evil bird still perched there. It has been predicting luck all the afternoon. Very bad luck, I must say!"

"Luck!" croaked the bird sullenly, eyeing us as we went by; "it means luck!"

"It does, does it?" said Viswanath, picking up a stone and flinging it at the bird, "So does this!"

The stone, however, went wide, and Coca, scenting trouble, flew into the house. "Luck! Luck!" it cried, "it means luck!"

"Rotten," I said, "Dashed rotten luck by the look of things."

"Remember," said Viswanath, "the astrologer predicted both good and bad luck. Well, the bad has come first. Let us wait for the good."

"Pooh!" I said, "if you want to know what I think, I strongly suspect that that astrologer is at the bottom of this business. I shouldn't wonder if he rifled the safe when we were all outside looking at the sun. He and his predictions!"

"We'll wait and see," said Viswanath.

Now I don't wish to take any credit for myself, but my suspicions proved to be correct. Everything indicated the astrologer as the thief. All efforts at finding him, however, failed. But the police, stirred into an unusual vigilance, succeeded in arresting a man who proved by his own confession to be an accomplice of the astrologer. This man, however, disclaimed all knowledge of the money or of the jewels, but he led the police to an old disused well, at the bottom of which the astrologer it seemed had hidden his spoils from time to time. A search in this well proved extremely disappointing, as it resulted in the discovery of nothing more than an old fountain-pen, a pair of silver links, and a set of gold ear-rings, wrapped in an old newspaper and hidden under a stone.

To cut a long story short, Boothalinga Modeliar never saw his money or his jewels again, though he had the melancholy satisfaction of learning

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some time later that the accomplice was convicted and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment with hard labour extending over many years. The most celebrated astrologer in South India was, as you may easily guess, never heard of again.

My interest for the moment is in none of these things. On the day that the police effected the capture of the accomplice, the New Year Honours list came out in the papers. It was Viswanath who saw it first.

“Hurray!” he shouted, “Old Boothalinga gets a Dewan Bahadur. Well done, Boothalinga!”

“So the astrologer was right!” I exclaimed, hardly able to believe my ears. “And the good luck has come!”

“Yes!” said Viswanath, “but at what a price!”

“Don’t mention it,” I said, “the favour of the ruling classes, like wisdom, is greater than rubies!”





THE LUCID INTERVAL.

My duties as a Superintendent of Post Offices compel frequent journeys by rail, but far from modifying a disposition which my friends tell me is extremely unsociable, they have only served to make me more reserved than ever, though you might have expected the contrary result from the intimate and familiarising effects of constant travel. I invariably seek an empty compartment, and when I find one, dispose my belongings on the seats in a manner calculated to turn away all other seekers for places, by producing the impression that every available inch of space has already been booked. And, of this, after much practice I have

made a fine art. When, however, I do not find an altogether empty compartment, I accept the conditions of the game without much disturbance to my equanimity, although it makes me more determined, if that is possible, to keep myself rigidly to myself. But the other evening, travelling from Calicut to Madras, all my well-laid plans came to nought, and I was subjected to a curious and startling experience, which was an outrageous violation of all my valued and long-cherished principles. It happened on this wise.

Having preserved my compartment from the inquisitive attack of nearly a dozen large families, for a period of nearly five hours, I thought I had earned my tea at Podanur, which with one eye on the door, I ordered immediately on our arrival at that station. Having hurriedly gulped down two cups, I dismissed the waiter, and sat back in my place refreshed and ready for more encounters. In three minutes I had the satisfaction of seeing four hurrying old gentlemen, and one young lady, stop suddenly, to pass on again with wistful eyes and quickened footsteps. In another minute, the guard's whistle sounded from the rear of the train, and with a jerk the journey was resumed, the while I secretly exulted in my corner. But we had scarcely

moved two yards, when something like a stampede was heard, a body rushed past my window, my door was violently wrenched open, and there lurched into my solitude, an unusually large and eccentric looking young man, who stood panting where he had entered, looking down into my startled eyes, in a most disconcertingly triumphant manner. "Done it!" he gasped, still looking down on me, and then after a few moments, again, "Done it!"

As I had not the least desire to know what he had done, having been sufficiently annoyed by the manner of his doing it, I maintained a stolid silence, even as I moved to shift a turban which I had carefully placed on the opposite seat, nearer home. I then looked coldly at the vacated spot, and up at the new arrival, to indicate that he might sit there if he cared to, and instantly entrenched myself behind a newspaper. But contrary to my usual experience I found that I could not fix my attention upon the columns of information before me. The eccentric young man seemed to exercise a strange fascination over my mind; I found myself following his movements, and reckoning his age; wondering what the splendid thing he had done could be, and why he had risked his life in such a foolhardy manner; and

thousand other things of a like nature. Meanwhile, the object of my speculations had seated himself in the place I had assigned to him. But I observed that he was afflicted with a singular restlessness, for he kept turning and twisting round, now gazing at me, now out of the window, and now at the embossed ceiling of the carriage; until, at last, to my great astonishment, he curled himself up most curiously in a very little space, and went soundly to sleep.

For quite half an hour perfect silence reigned in the compartment, and I was in the middle of a three-column oration, through which I was steadily working, when suddenly my fellow-traveller started up, and reaching over, gave me a smart slap on the thigh, standing up the while, and glaring at me with a most ferocious look on his face. I remember noting at that moment the elegance and cut of his clothes and the perfect proportions and balance of his figure, but I considered the whole effect marred by the idiotic thing he was doing.

“Sir,” he cried, shaking his fist in my face, “you are the most unnatural man I have ever come across; here have I been cooped up with you for forty mortal minutes, and not a word has passed between us. It beats me altogether, unless you are either dumb, or mad.”

"Sir," I said with studied coldness, for I thought an effective snub would end matters at once, "You blew in here like a hurricane; I have had little to do with hurricanes, and know less of their customs and manners. Nor have I any desire to improve my knowledge in this particular. I would request you therefore to leave me alone, even if it only be to give me an opportunity to forget your most unwarrantable rudeness." And I screened myself with my paper again.

My companion stared at me for a whole minute, and then burst out laughing. It made me quite nervous to hear him; and his subsequent actions were not calculated to still my fears as to his sanity. For, he suddenly snatched the paper out of my hand, threw it out of the window, and coming over to my side, sat facing me in a most threatening attitude.

"Sit right there," he said, for I made an attempt to get up, "and listen to me, because I want to tell you certain things about myself.—Yes, you were right when you thought I was a madman—at least I was one until a few hours ago, and perhaps I shall be one again, a few hours hence. But," he continued, seeing the fear I could not keep out of my looks, "there is nothing to be

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frightened about, at all. I belong to the harmless variety ; moreover, this is one of my lucid intervals, or how could I have given my keepers the slip? Of course they will be ready for me at the other end, but I don't mind that so much, now that I have someone to speak to."

He settled himself more comfortably, while I threw a despairing look at the communication-cord, and hurriedly prayed to all my Gods to save me from this lunatic.

"For you see," he went on, "that is what I am crazy about. I must speak, or I must die. The trouble is, sometimes I speak of things that nobody seems to be able to understand, and then they say that I am mad; and at other times I appear to be quite easily understood, and then they say it is a lucid interval. Personally, of course, it makes no difference to me, but I want to convince you that I can speak sense, and so I am going to tell you a story,—the story of Chinna-devaraya of Mudabidri."

I had by this time quite given up hope, and desired only to placate my companion by falling in with his outrageous humour. God help me! What else could I do? Had I not heard that it was a most dangerous thing to rouse the anger of a madman?

So there I sat, a pitiful figure of impotence, trying to screw my face into a smile appreciative of my companion's conversation, and desperately hoping against hope for a speedy deliverance.

"Ah!" said my tormentor, noting my attempt at a smile, "you are interested, already; and I promise you, it is as pretty a tale as ever you heard in your life. I don't suppose you know South Kanara at all. Yes? Well, then I need not tell you that some of the finest Jain monuments in South India are to be found in that district, and if you have been to Mudabidri, I am sure you will bear me out that The Temple of the Thousand Pillars is as wonderful a specimen of ancient Indian Architecture as any one can hope to see. I tell you this because I was born there myself and am right proud of it. So was Chinnadevaraya, the hero of my story, who became the Ruler of Mudabidri in the year 1489. South Kanara was at that time subject to the great kingdom of Vijayanagar, which was then at the height of its prosperity, and the ruler of Mudabidri paid a tribute of 2,000 pieces of gold every year to his suzerain and overlord. Now, the King of Vijayanagar at this time was also named Chinnadevaraya, a monarch distinguished alike by his wisdom, generosity, and

valour, towards whom his namesake of Mudabidri cherished the greatest devotion. But it so happened that in the year which I have named, a great misfortune befell the latter."

My companion stopped here to pull up the window immediately behind him. I began to wonder if he was really mad after all, his narration was so clear and sustained. It even looked as though it was going to be interesting; and I forced another smile.

"No," I was told at once, "you are smiling in the wrong place; there is no reason why you should smile at the misfortune that befell Chinnadevaraya of Mudabidri." I hastily brought the corners of my lips to attention again. "For, the poor man was not responsible for it at all. Observe how the whole thing came to pass. When that year, at the accustomed time, his tribute of 2,000 pieces of gold was paid into the Royal Treasury at Vijayanagar, the Karnik or the chief treasurer, who had a grudge against him, thought it a good opportunity for bringing him into disfavour with his master. The very next day, he went to the king and craved an audience.

"'Maharaj,' he said, 'this man who is your subject, see how he calls himself in this writing of

his,—by the very name by which *you* are known,—a piece of insolence which merits exemplary chastisement! And he held out the communication in which the ruler of Mudabidri had shown his accounts, and in which he had signed himself, *Chinnadevaraya*. The King looked at it, and was incensed at this impertinence of his vassal.

“‘He grows ambitious,’ said the king darkly, frowning.

“‘The Maharaj speaks truth,’ said his crafty minister, urging the point. ‘And soon his ambition will overstep its bounds; now he has but coveted the name of the King, but who knows what he will covet next? It may be the King himself.’

“‘Karnik,’ said the king, ‘enough; have this presumptuous man sent for at once, and we ourselves shall deal with him.’

“So the Karnik withdrew, well-satisfied with the success of his plans. He immediately despatched a force of 200 men under the leadership of his own nephew, to whom he entrusted the duty of bringing the hapless ruler of Mudabidri back with him to the presence of his sovereign.” And as he said this, the eyes of my companion glowed with a fierce light. “Ah that Karnik,” he muttered, clenching his fists, “the treacherous black-hearted

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son of a dog!" He controlled himself, however, greatly to my relief It had grown quite dark by this time, but I simply dared not make an attempt to switch on the lights.

"Never mind the lights," he said, as though he had read my thought, "it is just as pleasant without them. . . . So they came to Mudabidri, and found Chinnadevaraya recovering from a long illness which he had survived only because of the unremitting and untiring attentions of his old and faithful servant Mahalinga. But this did not stand in the way of his being taken to Vijayanagar, to answer for what charge he knew not, and only the devoted Mahalinga was allowed to accompany him. Immediately they arrived at the City of Victory, they were taken to the Karnik, who at once acquainted the king with the news of the apprehension of his vassal, and his presence in the city. But the king happened to be busy at the time, and commanded that the Ruler of Mudabidri should be thrown into a prison, until he was at leisure to attend to him. And because the king's mistresses were exceedingly beautiful and winsome he straightway forgot both his unfortunate namesake, and the punishment that his presumption demanded.

“So Mahalinga and his master, were thrown into prison where they suffered greatly, and where they remained a long while, almost the space of a twelvemonth. And they were not called before the king all this while, because, according to the practice of those times, no man dared remind the king of his prisoners, who, he had commanded, should await his pleasure. But the next year when the accounts were being settled, the tribute due from the Ruler of Mudabidri was found to have been unpaid, and the Karnik lost no time in acquainting his master with the fact.

“‘Wherefore has he not paid it?’ demanded the king sternly.

“‘My Lord!’ replied the Karnik, ‘the man was cast into prison at your command twelve months ago, and he still waits your Majesty’s royal pleasure.’ And then the king remembered.

“‘Let him be brought before me tomorrow in the morning,’ he ordered, and the Karnik retired to inform his enemy.

“Meanwhile the companionship of Mahalinga had prevented his master from despairing altogether, though they were both in a poor state. But when the old man heard the charge made against his young master, he trembled and was

silent for a while, and spoke to him in this manner: 'Tomorrow, O my Lord, we shall be taken before the king. This charge against you will have to be answered, and it may be answered only in one way. Do you, I pray, remain silent when you are questioned concerning your name, and leave the burden of the reply on me. Promise me this, and all shall be well.'"

The voice of my companion seemed to quaver and break as he uttered these words; at any rate he told his story with much feeling and passion, and, in truth, I seemed to find the tale quite interesting. In fact I was quite anxious to know what happened to the unfortunate ruler.

"The unfortunate ruler," said my narrator, again marvellously echoing my thought, "agreed wearily, and turned on his side and groaned. The following morning, the two prisoners were taken before the king, who sat in state in the audience hall. They prostrated themselves before him, and rose only at his bidding. There was an ominous silence in the great hall as the king put his question to his erring vassal. Why had he with so much presumption and ingratitude assumed the name of his Sovereign and master, when there were so many other names from which to choose?

“‘My Lord,’ replied the young man,” and there was almost a sob in the voice of the man who sat opposite me, “‘My Lord, hold me not guilty in this matter. That name was given to me by my parents, for what reason I do not know. Perhaps this old man who has been my faithful servant ever since I was born, may know; but disloyal to your Royal Highness in thought or word or deed I have never been.’ At this Mahalinga stood forward, and prostrated himself again, and on his being asked whether he knew the reason for that particular name having been bestowed upon his young master, replied—

“‘O your Royal Highness you are yourself to blame in this matter.’

“‘What! We ourselves! And pray, old man, how may that be?’

“‘My Lord’ he said, ‘O pardon me this tale. My master, the father of my young Lord here, had eighteen children, my young lord himself being the eighteenth. And of all these eighteen he alone survives. Fondly they called their first-born Krishnadevaraya, but the babe died in a month. Their next they named Ramadevaraya, nor did he live much longer. The one that came after him they called Govindevvaraya, but with even less

success, for he died in a week. And so seventeen children were born to them, and were named, and died, and there was not in all our land so sorrowful a couple, as my master and my mistress. Then was born unto them their eighteenth child, and he came into this world on the same day as* you ascended the throne of this mighty empire, and my master and my mistress decided that they would call him in honour of that day, by your name. Wherefore it was done, and lo! the child lived and grew into a comely lad, and he prospered even as you prospered, until in the fulness of time he succeeded to the land of his fathers, and he stands here now, O my Lord, for no fault of his. If, therefore, you should cause him to be put to death, behold even he that was called by your name shall be dead, and your power and your glory shall have availed him nothing. Even more, his prosperity is bound up with yours as yours is with his (so says an old prophecy), and if he should be cut off in the prime of his manhood, I dread to think how it shall be with you, O my King!'

"Enough," shouted the king, "I am convinced of the loyalty and good faith of your master; and," continued he turning to his courtiers, "my lords, look ye well upon this man, Chinnadevaraya of

Mudabidri, for in him lies the safety of your prince; his prosperity is our prosperity; his good name, our good name; and therefore shall he be honoured amongst us; approach, O Chinnadevaraya, and be embraced of your king,' and so saying, the king* folded the young ruler in his arms; and thereafter loaded him with many rich presents, and sent him back to his principality, having shown him many other signal marks of his favour and regard, nor did he forget to reward the faithful servitor, Mahalinga, whose devotion to his master had touched the heart of the monarch.

"And I," said my eccentric companion, rising suddenly, and drawing himself to his full height, placing his right palm over his breast proudly, the while, (and at this the compartment was suddenly flooded with light somehow) "and I, am that Chinnadevaraya of Mudabidri whose story I have just narrated to you."

I could only stare stupidly at him, as he made this absurd assertion, but all in a second something seemed to happen, and I was looking not at my erstwhile story-teller, but at a thin, tall, pleasant-looking individual, who, with his head thrown back and resting on his interlocked fingers, was eying me with an amused expression on his face.

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“You have had a good nap,” he remarked, “and you dreamt of Chinnadevaraya of Mudabidri didn’t you? No, don’t look so startled. Just a little experiment of mine! Hypnotic transference during sleep, that’s all. And the rest by auto-suggestion. I found you here fast asleep and well I simply couldn’t resist the temptation. No ill effects you know Hullo, here we are. Erode, and dinner, and all that. What, not coming along? Well, shall be back soon. Keep a berth for me in here. Going up to Madras, same as you.” And with that he was off down the platform, in search of the refreshment room.





MR. DATTATRYA PAYS

The Ravana Motor Service Company has, appropriately enough, ten dilapidated vehicles which ply for hire between Mangapur and Coondagod in accordance with a time-table more honoured in the breach than the observance. These buses are of the char-a-banc type, but obviously so ancient that it is a continuous marvel to everyone how they hold together at all. Only one thing is more painful to the senses than the dismembering jolts to which all passengers are subjected once these relics of auto-locomotion have been persuaded to move, and that is the rasping, nerve-shattering medley of sounds which provide an

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accompaniment to their progress. Indeed, more than one case is on record of agonised travellers who, unable to endure this combination of afflictions, have leaped overboard in a temporary fit of insanity, and so maimed themselves for life.

Every day at 7 A. M. and at 2 P. M. one of these buses is scheduled to leave Mangapur from the northern corner of Bumpanmatta, where the company's offices are situated directly below Koragappa's drug stores. The scene at this spot during the moments of departure, particularly when, as often happens, it is a good half-hour past the scheduled time, is one of frenzied confusion. There is much hoisting and strapping of sundry articles of luggage on the top of the bus to the accompaniment of shouts and objurgations from those below.

You are, however, entirely wrong if you think that the sight of a Ravana Motor Bus about to depart is equally bewildering to everybody. That stout prosperous gentleman over there in the yellow tussore coat, unbuttoned so as to show his striped silk shirt, and occupying the seat of honour next to the driver, is certainly not bewildered. The kindly expression on his benevolent face seems to be habitual with him, and I have never

seen anything half so self-satisfied as his calm survey of those toiling about him, the while he gently chews his betel. Take a good look at him, for he is the hero of this story. Note the fat gold chain and the heavy seals that weigh down the breast-pocket of his coat, his fine laced turban, the large diamonds that glitter in his ears. Note also the shrewd eyes that take in everything as they peer out from under bushy iron-grey eyebrows, and those fine-cut lips which, for all the general kindness of his appearance, hold more than a hint of sensuality and cruelty. You are not far out if after this careful study you have come to the conclusion that the man must be a wealthy merchant.

One moment, however. It is exactly 2.27 P.M., and the bus has started—with a jerk. Down the narrowing, rain-washed roads of Mangapur it roars its way honk-honking at the pigs and dogs that leap from under its very wheels, and stand gazing after it in a dazed manner. The passengers, most of whom have their hands to their ears, are already being jolted into an unwelcome friendliness, while our benevolent friend by the driver has settled himself even more comfortably on the hard threadbare cushion which distinguishes first-class

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seats. Presently the crowded bus swings and lurches out of the town, and the fresh air of the countryside beats gratefully into it, and to no one is it more welcome than to Mr. Kiralbogi Dattatrya Shenoy.

And now while the bus hums and screeches its way, winding and hilly, glimpsing now and then magnificent stretches of undulating country, or panoramic views of streams and green-clothed valleys, let me tell you something of Mr. Shenoy and of his thoughts as he gazes contentedly about him.

Mr. Shenoy as you rightly guessed, is a merchant, and enormously wealthy. He deals in coffee and pepper, and what he does not know about the trade is hardly worth knowing. But in business, knowledge alone is not power. A certain amount of luck is indispensable, and our friend has always been extremely fortunate. He was not modest or diffident in his speculations, neither was he unduly rash or hasty, but not infrequently what seemed to be the outcome of his foresight and resolution was really due to a freak of fortune. It is no wonder then, that in a comparatively few years, he had made a respectable pile to which every year brought its addition in an increasing proportion. He had not always been a wealthy man. His father had left him little or nothing, beyond the

schooling which he had received at the local Government College. There had been many hard days in his life, those days when as a clerk on fifteen rupees a month he had had to maintain himself and three children, not to speak of an orphan cousin, the burden of supporting whom he had taken on his own shoulders. Then in very desperation he had thrown up his clerkship and started a soda-shop. This had been a very prosperous undertaking, and soon he had been enabled to put by an amount sufficient to tempt him into a little speculation. That was the beginning of his affluence and, morally, of his ruin. Now he was one of the biggest and the harshest of landed proprietors in the district, was popularly believed to own at least a third of Mangapur, and enjoyed naturally a considerable consequence. He had not, however, altered his style of living. His prosperity had made little change in that direction. No one, for instance, had yet been able to persuade him into buying a car, and although he owned some of the finest houses in Mangapur, the house in which he lived himself was one of the meanest in the town. The people called him a miser, of course, and openly discussed his avarice and his unscrupulousness, but that did not affect him in

the least. He was quite indifferent to public opinion.

He thought of all these things with a sense of deep satisfaction. What had switched his mind back to his early struggles and successes he could not recollect, but, as the bus bumped its way along, he found himself going over in his mind the innumerable difficulties he had surmounted, the pitched battles he had fought against the envy and malice of his enemies. There had been that affair of the Shanbogue who had tried to ruin his business by spreading false rumours damaging to his credit, and on whom he had contrived to turn the tables most effectively. And that other affair with the Municipality in which again the latter had had to retire discomfited. Nor could he forget the tussle with a certain rich and powerful neighbour, which indeed by a fortunate circumstance had terminated successfully for himself in the Courts. What a long and interesting tale it was of his triumphs! Surely the Gods had been on his side, were on his side.

Why, it was only three weeks ago that he had paid back Cheetendra Bhat in his own coin; a man whom he had looked upon all his life as his sincerest friend, but, who, as events showed later, had been playing him false and prostituting his

friendship for months to his own advantage. Such perfidy sickened him, and he was not going to take that kind of thing lying down. And his horror, when he discovered that Cheetendra had actually been planning to put him out of the way merely because in that final quarrel, he, Dattatrya, had called him rogue and hypocrite! Well, rather than live in fear of his life, it had seemed to him preferable to employ a couple of well-seasoned rowdies to waylay Cheetendra and make an end of him. And the rowdies had performed their task with a nice sense of duty (had they not been paid handsomely?). They had beaten Cheetendra to a pulp on a Tuesday night and proceeded to Bombay by the next day's boat. That had been the end of Cheetendra, who had thus paid for all his sins. It was not exactly the first murder he had been responsible for, but one had to protect oneself and keep a wary eye, these days, or one went under oneself.

The police, active as usual, had proceeded to arrest a number of people, but for want of anything like proper evidence had been compelled to free them again. Their sixteenth, latest, and most sensational arrest had been of one Gunduraya Bhat, a nephew of Cheetendra himself, against whom

it appeared the circumstantial evidence was very strong. This had happened only the week before, and Mr. Dattatrya's amusement and sense of triumph can easily be imagined. Even now the recollection brought a smile to his face, a smile which emphasised the general benevolence of his countenance. You would hardly have thought that this man was a murderer, a murderer several times over.

The bus, now nearly shaken to bits, had after several halts for water passed through Karkur and Putpi. It had picked up no passengers on the way, being already too crowded. Mr. Dattatrya wondered mildly whether it would get to Coondagod before nightfall. It did not seem likely, because it was already 4. 30 by his watch and a good thirty miles had still to be done. He consulted the driver, who was himself very doubtful. "Anyhow before 8 P. M. we shall reach there" he said, re-assuringly. This was small comfort, and Mr. Dattatrya settled himself again to his musings. This time they were of a different character. He thought of the business which was taking him to Coondagod, a deal in coffee with the owner of a large coffee estate, a man quite as shrewd as himself, and against whom he would have to

employ all his arts to make a really profitable bargain. It was while engaged in thinking out his plan of attack that he became conscious that the bus was sputtering and slowing down to a stop. The driver leaped down in another moment to see what had gone wrong in the interior of his ancient vehicle, but apparently satisfied, he leaped back and got going again. Another furlong and the same thing happened once more. When it was repeated for the fourth time Mr. Dattatrya ventured to ask the driver whether anything had gone wrong. "Nothing wrong" was the reply, "only magneto out of order. But it does not matter. We will get on somehow." This cheerful prediction was not however fulfilled. A hundred yards further on, the bus again came to a stop, this time for good. "Can't go further" announced the driver in nonchalant tones, as if the most ordinary thing had happened, as indeed it had.

It would be putting it mildly to say that Mr. Dattatrya was annoyed. There he was stranded, at dusk, miles away from anywhere, and with no hope of being able to proceed any further until the next morning. On top of this, clouds were gathering overhead and a heavy shower was threatening. What was he to do? For the first few minutes he

contented himself with reviling the Bus Company which had placed him in such a predicament. These remarks directed at the driver and the conductor left both of them entirely unimpressed. They merely shrugged their shoulders and disclaimed all responsibility in the matter. In the end, everyone had to reconcile himself to making a night of it in the bus, and going supperless. Mr. Dattatrya was struck by the fact that the rest of the passengers had made little protest in the matter, and had speedily adapted themselves to the situation. They were even now engaged in pushing the bus to a spot under a tree by the roadside. He concluded that they were a particularly complacent set of people, and quite used perhaps to the imperfections of the Ravana Service.

Darkness fell rapidly. There was little to do beyond making oneself as comfortable for the night as the circumstances permitted. As the rain which had been threatening had held off, quite a number of the passengers prepared to make the bare ground their bed. A fire was soon made, and after sitting about it for some time, one by one, they rolled themselves up in a cloth and lay down near by to sleep.

Some preferred to accommodate themselves in the bus, and Mr. Dattatrya being among these,

the driver obligingly allowed him to make himself comfortable on the cushioned seat, which though narrow, and lumpy in parts, seemed certainly more attractive than the bare ground. Our friend sat brooding for some time over the unexpected mishap that had befallen him. He had a feeling at the back of his mind that the set-back was an ill omen which did not augur well for the business he had in hand. But deciding that such things were beyond him, he took off his coat, rolled it into a bundle, and lay down using it as his pillow.

Sleep did not visit his eyelids for a long time. From where he lay he could see a bit of the sky and several stars which seemed to look mockingly down upon him. Somehow they reminded him of Cheetendra Bhat, and his fancy dwelt shudderingly on the horrible condition in which the body had been discovered, mangled, and swollen, and discoloured, almost beyond recognition. Then he thought of the murderers he had employed, and the heavy reward which he had had to pay them for their services. He wondered where they were now, and what the feelings of Gunduraya Bhat were, and it was while still wondering that he dropped off into slumber.

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From this he was awakened rudely, by what, he could not tell. He only knew that his eyes had opened suddenly and that something was wrong. At first he could not say where he was, then recollection came upon him like a flood. Instinctively, his hands reached to his coat under his head, and his heart missed a beat when he realised it was not there. This was his first discovery; his next was that he was no longer in the bus, but on a tiled floor; his third, that he was not alone!

These discoveries created in him so great a panic that all he could do was to shut his eyes and hope that his heart would not burst. For some seconds he lay like this, perspiring from every pore. Then hearing a noise which came from his right side and which sounded like a cough (only it was more like a snarl), his eyes flew wide open again to meet agonisedly in the pitch darkness, not a yard from his own, two other eyes which seemed to fix themselves upon him with a baleful greenish-yellow glare. Mr. Dattatrya in his excess of terror could not prevent a scream from issuing from his agonised lips. At the sound of this, with another cough, the eyes drew nearer, and as they drew nearer, Mr. Dattatrya, now almost mad with fear, became aware of an awful stench. O Heaven, how had he

come into this place to keep company with this ferocious wild beast? O mercy, mercy, he prayed, in feverish silence calling upon all his gods for deliverance from the awful fate which seemed to be in store for him.

Meanwhile, the animal after smelling him all over seemed reassured and assumed once more its position by his side, but this time with its eyes turned away. Mr. Dattatrya lay trembling in a sweat of horror, incapable even of formulating a thought. Slowly, however, his reasoning powers asserted themselves, and his first idea was to get up and make a bolt for it. But a slight, a very slight wriggle of his leg convinced him that some part of his clothes was under the animal, and that it would be impossible to stir without disturbing it, and thereby hastening his end. What a horrible position his was! Had ever man suffered as he was suffering then? Those few minutes of exquisite suspense were killing him, killing him. The question was how long he would have to endure the agony. Then his thoughts went on another tack. Was it impossible for help to come to him in time? He had heard of such timely rescues

It was then that he heard the sound of voices and steps. O blessed sounds! Yes, relief was indeed

near. And in his joy he shouted for them to come soon. The shout had hardly left his lips before the beast swung round with a snarl and was on him like a flash. Mr. Dattatrya screamed and screamed again.

But the animal did him no harm. It merely stood over him with a paw on either side. Mr. Dattatrya who had closed his eyes while screaming, half-opened them to recognise this fact. He recognised also that he was no longer in darkness. Where the light came from he could not say, but he could see he was lying in a small room at one end of which was a barred opening. Over him ferocious, and terrible to behold, stood the largest panther Mr. Dattatrya had ever seen. He closed his eyes quickly with a gasp. Then the thought struck him that it was all a dream. Yes, it was all a dream. That was the only way of accounting for it.

But a sudden sound of laughter, which seemed to come from beyond the bars, rudely dispelled this notion. Did anyone ever hear such horrid laughter in a dream? Peeping through half-closed lids, and with one eye on the beast above him, he saw two faces flattened against the bars and looking down upon him. Even to Mr. Dattatrya's disordered

mind they seemed more like spectators of his helpless position than rescuers. The beast had seen them too and with one bound it reached them.

"Down, Gowri, down," Mr. Dattatrya heard one of the men say, "Go back to your charge, sir, back!" And at the word the animal dropped on his feet and leaped back to his old position, but one of his paws landed on Mr. Dattatrya's right shoulder and he yelled out with pain. The beast bared its lips and growled a fearful growl which froze the blood in his victim's veins. Again the laughter rang out, and a stranger blend of hatred and bitterness and amusement was surely never heard in any laughter.

"So it pains, does it, Mr. Dattatrya, a pinch from Gowri pains?" asked one of the men. "Ha ha! Think what Cheetendra must have suffered. You had him beaten to death, beaten with sticks, beaten till the soul went out of his body, beaten by low-caste rogues, whose very touch was pollution! At him Gowri, give the devil a taste of his own remedies!"

The words had scarcely been uttered before the panther seized his victim by his shirt, and proceeded to shake him as a cat shakes a rat, growling all

the while in a frightful manner. Mr. Dattatrya's teeth rattled like castanets, his eyes started out of his head, and the room was filled with his howls for mercy.

"Drop him Gowri," said the voice behind the bars, and Mr. Dattatrya fell to the floor with a thud. For many seconds he lay there stunned, breathless, and with closed eyes, but was suddenly revived by a sharp prod in his side from a long iron rod wielded by one of the men. He opened his eyes with a yelp and a gasp. "Dattatrya She-noy," continued the voice, "do you realise now, the fate that is in store for you? Gowri has been well trained. He will chew your fingers one day (*prod*) your toes another, (*prod*) and slowly your arms and legs will follow suit (*prod*). Your agony will be long drawn, for we know, ha, ha, when exactly to stop him on each occasion. I have but to give the word and he will begin even now!"

"No, no, no," howled the victim of this ingenious torture. "Mercy, mercy, for the love of Heaven! Let me atone for my sins in any other way. It is true, it was I who ordered Cheetendra to be killed. It was I, it was I. Mercy! Mercy!"

"Silence, you dog!" said the voice sharply, and Mr. Dattatrya's pleadings trailed off into a

whimper. "Mercy? Do you ask for mercy? What mercy did you show Cheetendra Bhat our father, say, or the dozen other innocent men whose blood is on your hands. Do we not know, does not everybody know you for the cruel callous murderous devil that you are?"

"O—O—O—O" said Mr. Dattatrya.

"See," continued the voice, "we are the children of Cheetendra, whom you have rendered orphans, and we thirst for revenge. You shall die a death ten thousand times more agonising than the one you inflicted on our poor father. Gowri shall see to it. At him Gowri, give him another shake. It does our eyes good to see him suffer."

Again, Mr. Dattatrya was subjected to the attentions of the panther, who was this time more furious and more rough, if possible, than before; so that he was more dead than alive when he dropped from the beast at the word of its master. This time it took three severe prods to make him realise that he was being talked to. He could only moan.

"Ah, we can see you do not like it" said the voice. "Nor did our father like it, nor all the other victims of your malice and your lust and your greed and your hatred, when you brought

about their deaths. You with your kind face and your smooth tongue—ugh” and the owner of the voice spat violently upon the ground.

“But, listen,” he continued, “We are going to give you one chance of making amends. We the sons of Cheetendra wish that justice should be done to him in the eyes of everybody, of the world. We wish also that the innocent should not suffer for the guilty. Poor Gunduraya’s innocence must be made clear. We therefore offer to let you go free provided you make a full confession of all your iniquities.”

Mr. Dattatrya had by this time regained his breath. He had pricked up his ears at the offer of freedom but his heart turned to water within him at the condition imposed. Freedom merely to be taken and hanged by the neck till he was dead, dead, dead!—

“Let me die, let me die,” he groaned.

“Here is a full confession of all your crimes” went on his tormentor. “You have only to put your signature to it, and you are free to leave this place. For one week we shall do nothing so that you may have time to seek safety in flight. Seven days we give you for escape. At the end of that time we shall put your confession in the hands of

the police who will then do what they think fit. Come, are you ready, here is the confession."

"No, no, let me die, let me die," moaned Mr. Dattatrya with his eyes closed.

"Very well" came the voice. "We shall leave you with Gowri." And immediately the room was plunged in darkness again, and Mr. Dattatrya was left looking once more into the eyes of the panther who came close up to him growling softly. Terror had fallen upon Mr. Dattatrya's heart with the darkness, and he felt that he could bear anything but the horrible proximity of the panther. "Come back! Come back!" he shrieked. "I will sign, I will sign anything, only don't leave me here."

The light came back, and with it the faces of his tormentors. "Ha, ha," said the one who had spoken throughout, "so Gowri has brought you into a more agreeable frame of mind. That is well." And saying this he swung the barred door back and entered the room. The panther leaped up to him and played round him like a favourite dog. Brushing the animal aside with a "Down, Gowri, down!" the man strode up to where Mr. Dattatrya was lying watching these proceedings in a dazed manner, and bending down pulled him up

into a slow sitting posture. "Here, Ganesh," he said, turning and addressing his brother who was still outside, "bring that light in so that our friend here may read the tale of his achievements. Here," he continued, holding a paper before the unwilling eyes of Mr. Dattatrya, "read this, and sign below there."

Mr. Dattatrya took the paper between his shaking fingers and read with difficulty. As he read, twice or thrice he gasped and stopped, but was forced to go on. In the end, overcome by the ordeal he fell back almost in a swoon. But a growl from Gowri revived him marvellously. "I will sign," he said with desperate determination.

"Down there," said the man holding out a fountain pen, "and, mind you, no tricks!" Mr. Dattatrya signed, and with a groan collapsed. His tormentors examined the document carefully and were, apparently, satisfied. "Now, Ganesh," said the elder of the two who had taken the leading part throughout, "let us carry him out." Mr. Dattatrya came to life again hearing the barred door clang back into place, but this time behind him. "Let us dress him in his own clothes again" he heard one of the men say, and before he knew what they meant he found himself divested of the

clothes which were on him, and which, he noticed with a shudder, had been ripped and torn to tatters as the result of the shakings he had endured. Others, which he recognised as his own, were offered him and he was ordered very curtly to put them on. While he was doing this, and it took him a long time, his fingers refusing to perform their services, he noticed that one of the men had disappeared. Then, while he was still struggling into his shirt, he heard a loud "Honk! Honk! Honk!", and the sound was so sudden and unexpected that it made Mr. Dattatrya jump.

And then he awoke! He found himself sitting up on the same narrow seat on which he had lain down the night before, and discovered that the driver of the bus was using his horn very effectively to awaken the sleeping passengers.

I will ask you to imagine for yourself the whirl of emotions which quite confounded Mr. Dattatrya's mind. Relief, I think, relief that the hideous tortures of the night had been after all only a dream--was the prevailing sensation. There was his folded coat from which his head had but even now been raised, there was the driver, and there the conductor and the other passengers, and last, but not least, there was he himself. It is true, his shirt

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was rucked up uncomfortably beneath his arm pits, true also that the least movement gave him severe twinges of pain, particularly in one shoulder, but considered in the broad light of day these were evidently due to the hardness of his bed and the peculiar cramped position which he had been forced to assume on the narrow bus seat. Of course it had been a dream! And this conclusion was confirmed when one of the passengers came up to him and enquired in a friendly manner how he had slept and whether he was not feeling well, because they had heard him cry out in his sleep several times. He also added that they would now be able to get to Coondagod soon, as the driver had somehow managed to repair the defect which had put the engine out of order the previous evening. This news was substantiated by the driver himself who climbed into the bus at that moment and called out to all the passengers to take their seats. Mr. Dattatrya hastily made room for him by removing his legs from the seat and slowly drew on his coat

The bus reached Coondagod without further mishap, but all the way Mr. Dattatrya sat in a dazed manner going over in his mind the horrors of the night, and wondering whether such an

experience had ever befallen any man before. It was a dream, but he felt that even at that he would prefer to have no more of that brand, thank you.

The rest of the story is soon told. Mr. Dattatrya transacted his business with the coffee-planter, but in this he was not so successful as he had hoped to be. He would have returned to Mangapur the very next day but for a severe attack of fever (the sub-assistant surgeon called it Influenza) which compelled him to stay on in Coondagod at the house of his friend Panduranga Shenoy, High Court Vakil. It was quite a fortnight before he was declared fit to journey back home, and if you had been under Koragappa's shop that Wednesday afternoon, you would have seen the return of Mr. Dattatrya. You would also have seen something far more exciting, and that is the manner in which Mr. Dattatrya was arrested by two policemen and a sub-inspector on the charge of murdering one Cheetendra Bhat, merchant, and landowner of Mangapur. Their seventeenth arrest, and, as it turned out, their last.

Too late Mr. Dattatrya realised the diabolical cunning of his enemies, and the double trap into which he had fallen. In the first place they

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had managed to waylay him and extort a confession from him promising a seven days' respite. At the same time they had taken the greatest trouble to lull him into the belief that the incidents of the night had been merely a dream. Heaven alone knew how they had brought these things to pass, but it was only too clear now that it was not in a dream he had been tortured by these villains and their panther into signing that fatal confession. He would of course plead "Not Guilty", but what chance was there, against such tremendous odds?

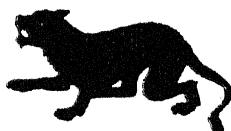
At the Sessions, which came on a couple of weeks later, Mr. Dattatrya was defended by no less a barrister than the great and justly famous Snorton, of whom, it was well known, even High Court Judges stood in awe. But even this great advocate could not get round the signed confession of the accused which the energetic Public Prosecutor so triumphantly produced, and which proved the most sensational feature of the case; sensational because of the circumstances in which popular report stated it had been obtained, and also because of the other crimes which it now cleared up and which the police had hitherto given up as impossible of detection. It is scarcely necessary for me to

add, perhaps, that the Sessions Judge convicted Mr. Dattatrya of murder and sentenced him to death, and that on appeal the High Court commuted the sentence to one of transportation for life; these are facts which every one is aware of.

If, however, you ask me to explain how it was that the sleeping Mr. Dattatrya was conveyed to the house in which the panther played so important a part, and brought back, without his own knowledge or the knowledge of anyone else in the bus, I can only tell you what, also, everybody appears to know. They say that Cheetendra's sons had hired the whole bus and filled it with their own men and that the breakdown at a spot so convenient to the designs of his enemies had been a matter that had been specially arranged. They also say that the youngest son of Cheetendra is an adept at hypnotism and that the motor car journeys from the bus to a farm house of Cheetendra's eight miles away, and back, in the middle of the night, were performed while Mr. Dattatrya was under hypnotic influence. There are some, I know, who even go the extent of saying that the Panther too was a clever hypnotic hallucination, and that poor Dattatrya was made to imagine the horrors which had put him into such a state of mortal terror. I

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cannot ask you to believe all this, but I must say that most of it certainly sounds plausible. As for what exactly happened, I wonder whether anyone will ever know that.





PORTRAIT OF A VEGETARIAN

66 Talking of transfers—,” said Cariappa, flicking the ash of his cigar deftly into the open mouth of a china gargoyle supplied by the club as a receptacle for such odds and ends, “ Talking of transfers, have I ever told you the story of Percival Kuppiah?”

There was a moment’s uncomfortable silence, and then, as one man, the three of us pushed our chairs back, and made as if to rise from the table.

“ Allah!” exclaimed Cariappa, with raised hands and a fine show of scorn, “ What worms you are! I don’t think you have a soul between the three of you to call your own!”

“But it’s getting late,” I murmured, in attempted self-defence.

“Holy Ramadan!” shouted Cariappa, who is a man of strange oaths and exclamations. “Late!—Did I hear you say late? Why, it is only seven, seven in the evening, and you fellows want to scuttle home! Upon my word,” he continued, with increasing choler, “you beggars don’t deserve to have a club, for none of you seem to have any idea what club life means. What in thunder do you think a club is for?” And he brought his fist down upon the table with a bang which made the glasses ring, glaring at us for all the world like an irate schoolmaster at so many children, who had given him the wrong answer.

I don’t think we had really wanted to escape Cariappa’s story, having pretended to rise merely to tease him. He is our Policeman, and, having the malefactors of the district in his charge, is a man of no little consequence, and has endless tales to tell. Besides, he is a thoroughly good fellow, and in the club we always humoured him because of his age and his experience. During his show of vehemence, therefore, we had re-seated ourselves with pretended patience on our faces, and long-suffering in our sighs. We had the club to

ourselves; no one else had turned up, and it did not seem as though more were coming that evening. So there we were, at the end of the long verandah, quite at the mercy of our story-teller, and in the full radiance of a broad moon, which was rapidly ascending the solitary palm tree near the gate.

"Percival Kuppiah" began Cariappa, his good humour restored, and calling for drinks all round, "Percival Kuppiah—"

"One moment," interrupted Sundararaj, who is our tax-gatherer, "Is this the Kuppiah of the Educational Department who is now at Jotadri?"

"The very same," replied Cariappa, "there is only one such, and I think we may thank God for it."

"Kuppiah," continued Cariappa, "has been known to me now for over six years, and yet in all that time I have not discovered in him a single quality worthy of either commendation or respect. He is the stingiest and the meanest of mortals, more mean indeed than that uncle of Mark Twain's, who, owning the posterior half of a cow that he shared with his nephew, took all the milk, while his partner had to do all the feeding; and who,

when the animal butted into his hedge and spoilt it, went to the extent of suing his nephew for damages, as he was responsible not only for the upkeep but also the behaviour of the forward half of the beast. Percival Kuppiah beat that uncle hollow. Mind you, as the world goes, he is a very wealthy man, has no end of private property and all that, but he eats only one meal a day to save what he calls "household expenses." With this meanness goes an avarice which is all-consuming; and as for the rest of him, that is compounded of about equal proportions of envy, malice and pride, though Heaven alone knows what he has to be proud of.

"And then (I suppose he was born that way), he is as peevish, as quarrelsome, and as revengeful as the devil. Like most small men who think a hell of a lot of themselves, he has a tremendous sense of his own dignity, but absolutely not a vestige of a sense of humour. Moreover, he belongs to that order of beings who cringe to and fawn upon their superiors, and, at the same time, make life unbearably impossible to those who have the misfortune to serve under them. In fact, all told, I do not think he possesses one single instinct which you could call gentlemanly, and when I have

said that, I think you have the hero of my story in a nutshell."

"What a character you have given him!" murmured Visvanath, our genial munsiff, making a face.

"Not at all," went on Cariappa, "not at all. If anything, I should say I have understated the case. Well, I first came across him at Gondipatla where he was one of the lecturers at the Government College, but our acquaintance, though long enough to make me realise the nature of the man, was of brief duration, for within a couple of months of his arrival, I was transferred to Gelmara. In less than a year, Kuppiyah too was transferred to the College there, and it was at Gelmara that the incidents that I am about to relate occurred. I myself had the details from Ramalingam, the Principal of the College, with whom I happened to be sharing a house at the time.

"Poor Ramalingam! From the moment Kuppiyah took charge of the post of Vice-Principal in the Gelmara College, there was trouble; and having some idea of the man, I don't suppose it surprises you to hear that. He was at loggerheads with nearly everybody, excepting, of course, the Principal, into whose good graces he lost no opportunity of insinuating himself. There was endless bicker-

ing over time-tables and late-coming, and casual leave, and work undone or overdone, where all had been smooth sailing before. So that within a fortnight of his coming, he had made implacable enemies of all his colleagues, who simply loathed his domineering ways and insufferable sneers. One of them in particular, Sourinathan, I think his name was, felt he had borne more than the rest, and owed Kuppiah a grudge for some remark or other more irritating than usual. It was not many days before there was an open rupture between the two over some alleged fault of Sourinathan's.

“I shall report you to the Principal for this,” said Kuppiah at the end of the argument, as though that clinched it, ‘And you know what that means!’ he added, with a nasty glint in his eye.

“Mind your own business,” retorted Sourinathan, out of all patience, ‘and don’t put on airs!’

“Don’t be impertinent!” barked Kuppiah, ‘I’ll write up to Madras and see you are transferred.’

“Transfer your grandmother!” returned Sourinathan, turning on his heel and not a whit daunted by the futile threat. I admit his language might have been more refined, but then you will see he had excuse.

“That, I think, gives you a fair idea of the state of affairs, and it went on like that from bad to worse, most of the members of the staff ranging solidly against Kuppiah, who could enlist on his side the sympathies of only the Physical Instructor and one or two of the simpler-minded of the Pandits. I don’t think Ramalingam was very happy during those days. He used to pour his woes into my ears and complain bitterly about the discord the new Vice-Principal had brought into the College. For a college, you see, is a sensitive organism, and students re-act instantaneously to disorders amongst the staff.

“‘I have had no peace,’ said Ramalingam one day, ‘since that man came into the College. All my time is occupied in listening to the tales he brings about others, or those which the rest bring against him. It’s an awful business.’

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘if that’s the case, and you are sure that he is the cause of all your trouble, why don’t you write up and get the blighter sent away somewhere else?’

“‘That’s the worst of it,’ exclaimed Ramalingam vexedly. ‘The perisher seems to have quite a lot of influence at Head-quarters, for my representations have fallen quite flat so far. Oh! it is lamentable,’

he went on, 'to see a miserable worm like him spoil the whole tone of the College. And the ridiculous part of it is, that in spite of several warnings from me, the fellow thinks he is in my good books, and carries on as though I countenance his conduct, blast him!'

"Many a time did Ramalingam speak to me in this fashion. You will understand, therefore, that in the end I came to take a lively interest in the doings of Mr. Percival Kuppiah.

"It was not very long before something really interesting occurred, and that was the quarrel, of which much was made later on, between Percival and his butcher. Now no one goes to the extent of quarrelling with one's butcher, at least not publicly, but Percival is the sort of man who rushes in, you know, where angels fear to tread. For some time, he contented himself with knocking his servant about for the bad meat which he brought from the market; until, that is, he discovered that the only butcher in the place, Kendrajee by name, was an old student of the College. Immediately, he suspected that the man was in league with one or more of the members of the College staff, and that he was sending him bad meat on purpose. His suspicions were confirmed,

when, on enquiry, he learnt that Kendrajee in his time had been a favourite student of Sourinathan's, and that they visited each other very often.

"Tell your butcher friend," he said to Sourinathan the next day, "that I shall thrash him if he does not send me better meat."

"Take care he doesn't thrash you and break every bone in your body" replied Sourinathan, who, though taken aback, was at no loss for a retort. "Kendrajee is a dare-devil, and I wouldn't meddle with him if I were you."

"We'll see," said Percival darkly; and indeed all the world, at least that part of the world which markets at Gelmara, saw next day, (and those who didn't see, heard) how Kuppiah settled his differences with Kendrajee, and how Kendrajee settled him.

"Kuppiah, it seems, accompanied his servant that day to the market and had Kendrajee's stall pointed out to him. He lost no time in making his way to where Kendrajee, who, by the way, is a huge, hairy fellow, was mincing some meat he had just weighed out.

"So you are the fellow," he began "who sends me bad meat every day. How dare you do it?"

"Kendrajee looked up from his chopping.

'No bad meat!' he said, waving his hand round his stall.

"'I'll report you to the Chairman of the Municipality' cried Kuppiah. 'See if I don't!'

"'Yes,' said Kendrajee, who is a man of few words, looking up again, 'Report!'

"'I'll tell the Collector about you, and have you kicked out of this place,' stormed Kuppiah, fast losing his temper.

"'Yes,' said Kendrajee, poising his chopper and turning an undisturbed glance upon his visitor. 'Tell!'

"'I'll write to Government and have you prosecuted,' shouted Kuppiah, beside himself with anger at the cool insolence of the butcher, and losing all sense of proportion.

"'Yes,' said Kendrajee, now laying his chopper aside and quietly folding his arms across his chest. 'Write!'

"'You don't care, do you, you rascal!' screamed Kuppiah, 'you cheat! you rogue! you scoundrel! I'll teach you!' And with that he lifted his cane and brought it sharply down upon Kendrajee's left shoulder. Well, the order of the subsequent proceedings was a little confused. No one quite knows what happened to Kuppiah. Kendrajee, I

believe, just let out a roar and shooting out a hand seized Kuppiah by his collar. For two whole minutes after that, you couldn't tell which was Kendrajee and which Kuppiah, until in fact the latter shot out on to the flagstones of the pavement beyond. For a moment, Kuppiah lay there stunned and bleeding, but was on his feet, before the dazed onlookers could rush to his help. 'With your life,' he snarled, shaking his fist at Kendrajee, 'You will pay for this—with your life!' Then he turned and slunk hurriedly away.

"Kendrajee merely laughed.

"Now an affair like that cannot take place in a comparatively small town like Gelmara without its making a noise. I think the whole place talked of nothing else the rest of that week. Everybody expected Kuppiah to proceed against the butcher in the Courts. But nothing of the kind happened. Kuppiah, I think, knew better than to waste his time and money in instituting an action for assault. He had, therefore, not much use for the law. Many reasons, however, were given for his inaction. Some said Kuppiah was afraid of losing, as it was he who had provoked the assault, and others, that it was due to the fact that not a single lawyer could be found to take up his case,

and others again ascribed his inactivity to Departmental inhibition. However that may be, Kuppiah was content to brazen it out amongst his colleagues. Not the least humorous feature of the episode was that he suddenly decided to become a vegetarian.

“Then all of a sudden the most astounding thing, I mean something even much more astounding than Kuppiah turning vegetarian, happened. *Kendrajee disappeared!* Clean off the face of the earth, as you might say; for, the most vigilant search failed to find him. Suspicion, I need hardly tell you, fell immediately upon Kuppiah. People remembered his threat and pointed out that this was what his silence had meant. But what could we do on a mere suspicion like that? We arrested him, of course, but it was clear from the first that he knew nothing about, and could not be implicated in, the disappearance of Kendrajee. So we released him. It was after that I think that Kuppiah began to see ghosts.”

“Ghosts!” exclaimed Viswanath. “Ha, ha, this is going to be exciting, I can see.”

“Very!” continued Cariappa, “O, very exciting! Kuppiah, you see, had never given a thought to ghosts until then, but he was to become an easy

convert to their existence and their influence. I know exactly what happened, for it all came out later.

"On the first occasion, I think it was three nights after Kendrajee's disappearance, Kuppiah, who, by the way, was a bachelor and lived alone, was disturbed by loud knockings at his door, followed by sudden piercing screams, which were succeeded in their turn by what he described afterwards as 'low mocking laughter.' He plucked up courage to open the door, but investigation revealed nothing, and his two servants, who slept together on the back verandah, declared they had heard nothing. Kuppiah went back to bed trying to believe that he had merely dreamed the disturbance, and as nothing further occurred that night, he woke up in the morning quite convinced that he had been dreaming.

"The next night things went a bit further. He woke up, suddenly, in the dark, convinced that there was something or somebody in the room, who shouldn't by rights have been there. Now, I should like to say that the sweat poured down our Percival's trembling body, and that every hair of his head stood bolt upright from sheer terror. I don't say so, simply because it was not the truth,

for, Kuppiyah, however undesirable in other respects, was at least, and this even I admit, no coward. He had, in fact, an abundant supply of that kind of rude courage which a lack of imagination often produces. He proceeded, therefore, coolly to strike a match; at least that was his intention, but the matches he had placed on a table close to his camp-cot were no longer there. Thinking the box might have fallen on to the floor, he groped on the ground, when suddenly *he felt sharp teeth close upon his fingers.*

“He leaped out of bed with a yell, and became aware for the first time of a dim, hooded finger in the far corner of the room. He was not really frightened even then, he said later, and made a step toward the apparition, when suddenly it seemed to melt and disappear before his very eyes. That, I think, gave him a shock, but he soon collected himself, and opening the door called to the servants to bring a light. The beams of the lantern with which they hastened to him revealed everything in order, even to the box of matches which lay on the table exactly where he had placed it before retiring. Taking it up curiously, he became aware that underneath it lay a small piece of paper which certainly had not been there

before, and on which he perceived some writing. 'Be not afraid,' he read, 'I shall come again. I bring good news.'

"I don't think Kuppiah slept much during the remainder of that night. He was too busy puzzling over the message which he had received, wondering how it had come there, and to whom the 'I' could refer. You or I would have left that house the next morning, never to return. Not so, Percival. He made up his mind to see the affair through, and moreover that last suggestion of good news had an allurement in it which he could not resist. That night, therefore, he resolved to lie in wait for his midnight visitor.

"In spite of his best efforts, however, he could not keep awake, but soon fell fast asleep. From this sleep, very much as on the previous night, he woke up quite suddenly with a strong sense of some presence in the room. The lamp he had kept burning had gone out. Gradually in the accustomed gloom, his straining eyes described dimly a muffled shape similar to the one he had seen the night before, but standing this time calmly at the foot of his bed. Suddenly, the hood fell from the face, and to his horror, Kuppiah recognised the pallid features of Kendrajee, looking awful and spectral.

“‘Kendrajee!’ gasped Kuppiah, ‘You! Here!’

“‘Yes’ said the spirit, in a voice so dismal and hollow that it sent a shiver down Kuppiah’s spine. ‘Here!’

“‘But what are you?’ asked Kuppiah, plucking up heart, especially as he observed that as yet no harm had happened to him. ‘What are you?’

“‘Dead!’ said the spirit, even more dismally. ‘Dead!’

“‘No!’ said Kuppiah, plucking up still more courage. ‘Impossible!’

“‘Yes!’ said the spirit. ‘Dead!’

“‘But how do you come to be dead? Who killed you?’ asked Kuppiah, now almost on his mettle again. ‘They say I did it, you know, but that’s all rot!’

“‘They lie!’ said the spirit. ‘Bunnojee, my old enemy, killed me.’

“‘Oh!’ said Kuppiah, noting this mentally for future reference. ‘And what do you want with me? Now that you are dead, I hope you are sorry for knocking me about as you did the other day.’

“‘Yes,’ said the spirit, ‘very sorry. Very, very sorry. I come to ask pardon. Also to make atonement. Otherwise, I shall have no rest in my grave.’

“‘Ho, Ho,’ laughed Kuppiah. ‘So you are sorry now, are you? I thought you would be.

And what atonement do you propose to make, pray? I am a vegetarian now, you know!

“The spirit ignored this flippancy. ‘In the southern corner of the maidan,’ it said, still in the same dismal tone, ‘there is a cannon. You have seen it many times. Between the wheels of that cannon lie buried, gold and jewels. Much gold, many jewels. No one knows this. It is a secret. Go and find the treasure and keep it. So may I find peace.’ Saying which, as on the previous occasion, it melted away into the air.

“I leave you to imagine Kuppiah’s emotions. I have already mentioned that he is nothing if not avaricious, and this new and sudden prospect of adding to his wealth was too dazzling for words. Treasure! Why, all his life he had dreamed of treasure, and here were his dreams about to be realised! I think he would have gone out that very night to verify the truth of what he had heard, but for the fact that a reference to his watch showed him that it was past four in the morning.

“How he got through that day, I do not know. His colleagues noticed in him a restlessness even greater than usual, and once or twice surprised a far away look in his eyes. One of them, with a turn for quotation, went so far as to ask him

Portrait of a Vegetarian

whether he was thinking of old, unhappy, far off things and battles long ago, but for once received no reply.

"Well, that night, at about twelve o'clock, Percival set out with a pick and a blanket, and soon covered the half mile which lay between his house and the *maidan*. When he came to the canon, which a benevolent Municipality has entrenched there for the edification of the public of Gelmara, he made sure that nobody was about, and crept in between the wheels. Then, taking off his coat, he put it over the hurricane lantern he carried, and feverishly set to work with his pick. He toiled for about three quarters of an hour, with short rests in between, and had made a hole about three feet deep, when suddenly his pick struck something hard, and Percival nearly whooped for joy. Proceeding with infinite care, he cleared the earth from the sides of what appeared to be a metal chest. It was not very large, but even so it required all his strength to lift it out of the hole. To his surprise, he found it was not locked.

"I think he was in the act of pulling up the lid so as to see what the chest contained, trembling at the thought of his good fortune, when a

rough voice hailed him and asked him what he was about. I don't know what you would have done in such a situation, but panic seized Kuppiah. Hastily shutting the lid down, he rolled the box up in his blanket, and seizing it with both hands, took to his heels. Nothing could have been more disastrous, for he was immediately pursued, and hampered as he was with the weight of the chest, was soon overtaken and seized. His captor turned out to be a policeman going his rounds, and in spite of Mr. Kuppiah's indignant remonstrances, he was hauled off to the Police Station just like any common thief.

"Kuppiah's fury may easily be pictured. He stormed and raved and threatened, while in his heart of hearts he was undergoing agonies of misery at the thought of how near he had been to success, and how unexpectedly his hopes had been dashed to the ground. But he little knew what was in store for him! At the Police Station his box was examined, and to the astonishment of everybody, it was found to contain some old clothes which when unrolled, gave forth a fearful stench and revealed to the shocked gaze of those who looked on, a number of human bones with the decaying flesh still clinging to some of them.

"The next morning, the clothes were identified as belonging to Kendrajee, indeed as being the very ones which he had had on at the time of his disappearance, and not a soul doubted but that Kuppiah had done him foully to death, in order to gratify his passion for revenge. For the second time, then, Kuppiah was arrested on the charge of murdering Kendrajee, and on this occasion, he was committed to the Sessions for trial.

"I need not dwell on the details of the case, which may probably be known to you, for it made a great noise at the time. Undoubtedly, it looked very dark against Kuppiah, for the circumstantial evidence was all of it against him. What was he doing at dead of night on the *maidan*? How did he come by the chest which contained the clothes worn by Kendrajee when he disappeared? Had he not threatened to take Kendrajee's life? Every one of these questions pointed in one direction only, and every one of his actions assumed criminal proportions in the sinister light now thrown upon them. It was in vain for him to talk of ghosts, and Bunojee, and hidden treasure. Nonsense of that kind merely made the court laugh grimly. To tell you the truth, it looked as though the fellow would have had to swing. Even so

celebrated a barrister as Grunting, who was specially got down for his defence, could make no headway against the evidence. And, upon my word, I think Kuppiah would have been hanged (many have been sent to the gallows upon far less evidence), but for an event that happened on the very eve of the day fixed for pronouncing judgment on Kuppiah. *And that was the sudden re-appearance of Kendrajee!*

“What!” exclaimed Sundararaj.

“Yes. Kendrajee reappeared as suddenly as he had disappeared, perfectly hale and hearty, and quite surprised to hear of the commotion his absence had created. I think we very nearly arrested him under the Section dealing with false pretences, for here was a fellow who was thought to be comfortably in his grave, suddenly popping up as lively as ever, and, by the mere fact of his presence, shattering the ingenious and elaborate theories the prosecution had so confidently put forward. It was really too bad. It was almost worse than contempt of court.

“Well, that was the end of that case. A more dramatic close could not have been imagined. Kuppiah, I need hardly say, was discharged without a stain on his fair name, and the judge made

him a handsome apology, in the course of which he made also several scathing comments on the cocksureness of the prosecution and the smartness of the Police. Thus did Kuppiah, who had borne the suspense of the trial with a remarkable stoicism, go forth again a free man."

"And is that the end of the story?" asked Sundararaj.

"Not quite," replied Cariappa, sadly. "The most astonishing part of it is still to come. It sounds incredible, but within less than a month of his release, Kuppiah received orders of promotion, promotion mind you, to a higher grade, and was transferred over the head of Ramalingam, to Jotadri, which is altogether a better place."

"That's the way things frequently happen," said Sundararaj sagely. "Besides, I suppose the Department considered him to be a particularly efficient officer. That type of person usually is."

"Probably also," I added, "it was an attempt at some kind of a recompense to the man for all the trouble he had weathered."

"Never mind!" said Visvanath cutting in, "What I am anxious to know is more about the affair of that ghost. Did you get any more particulars about that?"

“Not for a long time” said Cariappa. “In fact, it was nearly two years later that I ran across Sourinathan quite accidentally. We did not know each other, but it was not long before I realised I was talking to the man whom I had all along suspected of playing a part in the affair I have just narrated. And indeed it was so. He made no secret of it, but gave me a very vivid account of how Kendrajee and he had carried through the ghost trick with the intention of paying Kuppiah back for all his enormities, and of how they had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. ‘You have no idea,’ he told me, ‘how far a little string and some black cloth, backed up with a trifle in the way of mesmeric power, will go, in the ghost line. The real difficulty was to bribe Kuppiah’s servants into silence. But in the end we managed that, though it took quite a lot of money.’ Well, that, you see, was how the ghost was managed.

“As for Kendrajee, he still laughs when he thinks of Kuppiah and how he became a vegetarian. I am afraid, however, that Sourinathan is not quite so pleased at the thought that inadvertently he was responsible for Kuppiah’s promotion.”

“And is Kuppiah still a vegetarian?” I asked, “That seems to be the most entertaining part of your story.”

Portrait of a Vegetarian

“Curiously enough,” replied Cariappa. “He is; Kuppiah continues to be a disciple of Mr. Bernard Shaw.”

“I am not surprised,” said Sundararaj rising, “I suppose he finds that it comes cheaper, and further reduces his household expenses!” And he shrugged his shoulders expressively.





THE SECOND HONEYMOON

If you do not believe in the supernatural, you will probably laugh at this story, and attribute the incidents related, to perfectly natural causes. You are, of course, at perfect liberty to do so. Personally, I should not mind it in the least, as I keep an open mind myself on the subject. Moreover, my business just now is merely to relate things as they occurred. I do not profess to explain the facts, but only to set them down.

Properly enough, I think, the beginnings of my story go back to the day when Major Benoy Kumar Sen, D. M. O., of East Tinara, announced to his young and very pretty wife his

intention of spending the Christmas holidays at Purugur.

"Urmila," he said to her, on that eventful morning, pushing his cup forward for more coffee, "I know where we shall spend Christmas this year. Can you guess?"

"No, darling," said Urmila, pouring out coffee for the third time, and pausing in the act to look fondly at her big husband, "Where is it going to be? You are not thinking of running up to Madras, are you? Because, if you are, I shouldn't like it at all. Besides, you know the Boses have invited us to their place at Sakardog, and father half expects us to spend a few days with him at Cutchali."

"No, dear," said Sen smiling, and sipping his coffee with evident relish, "Not Madras, nor Sakardog, nor Cutchali, but a place to which I have often promised to take you and which at this part of the year will be quite heavenly. Now, can you guess?"

"Purugur!" cried Urmila, half leaping out of her seat and clapping her hands with delight, "It must be Purugur."

And then, she needs must run round to his chair, and put her arms round his neck from

behind, (a pretty habit, this, of hers, when particularly pleased), and murmur in his ear, "O you darling, I should love it! How good you are!" Whether she kissed him at this point, I am really not in a position to say, but there is a fair presumption in favour of it since they had been married hardly a year and you know how ridiculously such people do behave.

"Yes, sweetheart," said Sen, turning his head affectionately round to look at his absurd little wife, "Purugur it is, and Purugur it shall be. I think we shall have a splendid time. But now run away to your housekeeping," he continued, "here comes the Boy with the tappals."

So to Purugur they went, one evening, a few days later; to be more precise, on the 21st of December. To the uninitiated, I may here explain that the chief attraction of Purugur, which is twenty-seven miles out of Narmagole, the Headquarters of East Tinara, is its Bungalow, which has the finest situation of any, not in the district merely, but in the Presidency. Perched upon a hill which drops a sheer thousand feet down to the glorious valley and river below, it commands an unrivalled and marvellous view, all round, of the peculiarly impressive and beautiful scenery for

which East Tinara is deservedly famous. There is nothing to compare with it, except perhaps the Raja's Seat at Mercara, but then there is only a seat there, not a bungalow. And the Purugur bungalow is one of the largest and finest maintained by the District Board.

Just outside the compound, and a little to the left of the bungalow, is the famous Sikshamookh or Punishment Rock, a beetling, hoary, weather-beaten crag, from which the earth falls clear away for eight hundred feet or more. This sheer, stupendous drop, is one of the sights of the district, and many are the legends associated with it. All of them agree in that the Mookh was used in olden times as a place of punishment (whence its name), from which criminals or prisoners taken in war were hurled to immediate perdition. On one occasion (so one legend runs) the king of a great city which flourished mightily in the valley below, (no one knows when, and even its ruins are not to be seen now) in conformity with a law which he himself had passed, whereby no man or woman above fifty should be allowed to live, thrust nearly a fourth of the population of his kingdom over the Rock. A proceeding, which, we are told, provoked the Gods to so much wrath, that in completion

of his work, they sent destruction on the remaining three-fourths of the people in the shape of a dreadful plague. A mysterious fire that started soon after, burned the erstwhile magnificent city to the ground, and men thereafter dreaded the spot as though it were an unholy place. But once in every twelve years (the legend is still my authority), for the space of one night, the city came back to life in all its ancient splendour and magnificence, — a veritable City of Ghosts!

All this and more, Sen told Urmila over again, as they drove along in their powerful car that golden afternoon. Their servants and peons had gone ahead of them by the morning bus with their things; so all they had to do was to motor up and take possession. The country through which they hummed along was enchantingly beautiful. Now the road wound slowly up the emerald hills, and now it unwound again, equally slowly, down to the golden valleys and thatched villages, where little naked children gazed open-mouthed at them as they passed swiftly by. Above their heads in the perfect blue of the sky the hawks wheeled lazily. Never had the world seemed so beautiful or so pleasing to the eyes of Urmila.

The Second Honeymoon

“It will be glorious,” she said, edging closer up to her husband, “It will be almost like another honeymoon, won’t it dearest?”

“It will,” said Sen, smiling at her, “And talking of honeymoons, it won’t be the first time Purugur has been the scene of one. I have heard of at least three people who took their brides up there for their honeymoon. A wonderful place, as you will soon see. My only fear is,” and here his brow clouded, “that we may not have it all to ourselves. I do hope no one else will butt in, or has butted in already. I shall be wild if somebody has got there before us.”

“Let’s hope for the best,” said Urmila squeezing her husband’s hand, “Something tells me that we shall have the place to ourselves.”

“O does it?” exclaimed Sen, amused at his wife’s optimism. “That’s all right then. Only you can never be sure, you know.”

As it happened, however, it was all wrong. Urmila turned out a sad prophet, for when the car turned in at the gates of the bungalow, there seemed to prevail about it an unusual air of bustle, and many more people standing about than should have been the case if the place had been unoccupied. Sen fearing the worst, cursed the intruder in his heart, and groaned.

“Boy!” he called to his butler, who ran up with a peon as the car came to a stop before the steps of the bungalow, and his voice though low was angry, “Is there any one else stopping here?”

“Yes Sar” said the Boy, “Very sorry Sar, but Deputy Supraint, Mr. Bellal come yesterday morning, taking best room, Sar.”

“Damn!” said Sen, between his teeth, “And how long is he stopping?”

“Not going ten days Sar,” replied the Boy.

“Damn!” said Sen again, now giving up all hope. The intruder in question was a Jain with whom he had merely a nodding acquaintance. The policeman's reputation was not too good, and certain dark stories concerning him were current in the district. Sen's annoyance at the fellow's unexpected presence there may therefore be easily imagined.

Urmila who had tactfully been admiring the scenery during this little outburst (all good wives are like that; she too indeed was deeply disappointed at finding the bungalow occupied, only woman-like did not show it) now turned round. “Never mind, dearest,” she said, soothingly, “We will make the best of it. Come, let us get out, and after a wash, you must take me about and show me

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all the things to be seen. What a wonderful place!" she added, as she stepped out. "It surpasses all my expectations."

I wish to pass over the next half hour, during which Sen's anger and disappointment gradually cooled down. He felt more reconciled to the situation after a cup of tea, and began to look at things more cheerfully. It was this, I suppose, which made it possible for him to return, almost pleasantly, the greeting of Mr. Bellal, who, as it chanced, met them in the verandah as they were stepping out for a short stroll.

"Hope you are comfortable," said Mr. Bellal acknowledging his introduction to Urmila by a bow, "It is very pleasant here now, though a little chilly in the morning, but perhaps your side being more protected, you may not feel it so much. My side is more open—"

"If you would rather have our room," interrupted Sen quickly, determined not to lose any opportunity of getting the better room, "we shall be only too glad to let you have it, and shouldn't mind in the least moving over into yours. In spite of its openness I should prefer it. So—"

"Oh no!" said Mr. Bellal "I cannot think of depriving you of your room. Still if you prefer

mine, I have no objection at all to exchanging with you. Not to-day, it is too late; but tomorrow, yes, certainly!"

It was Sen's turn to deprecate, but Mr. Bellal was not to be put off. He seemed importunately obliging, and it looked almost a pity, to disappoint him, though the man's kindness made Sen feel just a little ashamed of himself.

"If you want anything by way of furniture," was Mr. Bellal's parting request, "please don't hesitate to take it from my side. I have more than I want."

"Quite a decent fellow," said Sen, as he walked along, pointing out the glories of the scenery to Urmila; "Seems to be a good sort, though from what I have heard about him, I should have expected just the opposite."

Urmila smiled, and said nothing. She indeed had not liked the looks of the man, nor the manner in which he had gazed at her. She was, however, only too happy that her husband had regained his cheerfulness, and was prepared to enjoy herself to the utmost. Purugur to her was as enchanting as fairyland.

Over the next thirty-six hours, though from one point of view they are important to my story, I do

not propose to linger. Sen and Urmila, now quite reconciled to their room, preferred, the next morning, to stay where they were. Mr. Bellal was busy the whole of the day seeing people and conducting enquiries, but in the afternoon, on their invitation, he joined them at tea on the Mookh, a thrilling experience for Urmila. The legends were gone over once more, Mr. Bellal proving a mine of information on the subject. He was an interesting talker, and among other things told them of a dastardly murder case into which he had been investigating, and in which a prominent Jain, belonging to a very ancient and highly influential family, was deeply involved. He gave them to understand, with a keen and almost revolting sense of satisfaction, that it was a hanging matter, and that his enquiries having been most successful, conviction was certain.

“The fellow calls himself a descendant of the old Kings” he said, contemptuously. “If the truth were told, I am that myself, but what good has it done me? Why, if the rascal had lived in the days of the merry monarch of whom we have been talking, they would simply have pushed him off this rock.” And pointing dramatically down the precipice he kicked a large pebble over. Urmila

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watched the pebble go singing down, until she could see it no more, and shuddered to think of the fate of a man condemned to be hurled down in the same manner.

“And talking of that pleasant custom,” continued Mr. Bellal, “Don’t you think that there is something queer about this place? I have been feeling it ever since I came here. Something in the atmosphere, you know, a kind of eeriness. Never felt that way before. A sense of invisible people moving and whispering about you. It was most pronounced this morning, when I was interviewing some people in connection with this very case. Also, for the last two nights, my rest has been very disturbed, and I am usually a good sleeper. All nonsense of course, but it has never happened before.”

Sen said he had felt nothing. He had slept as well as usual, if anything, better. No, there was nothing eerie for him there. He liked the place, and frankly revelled in it. And so, he was sure, did Urmila. It must be Mr. Bellal’s imagination . . . Urmila, however, looked thoughtful, and said nothing.

They turned back to the bungalow before dark, for fear of snakes, and when they were together again, Urmila told Sen something that had been

worrying her. She too, it seemed, had felt something rather unusual about the place, and her sleep also, had been disturbed the night before. She had moreover been awakened in the night by hearing moans and cries which seemed to come from Mr. Bellal's room, and turning to her husband had found him missing. Sen heard with astonishment, of how his wife had discovered the door open, and himself standing on the verandah steps in the pale moonlight, while low dreadful sounds proceeded from the other room. Urmila had led him back to bed and closed the doors, and had refrained from mentioning it till then, so as not to make him uneasy. He himself did not remember anything at all, but thought he had slept very well indeed, and had only a confused memory of certain interminable dreams. The news of his sleep-walking, however, disturbed him greatly. He thought he had cured himself of it six months back, but this was evidently a relapse. Poor Urmila, he thought, what a shame her rest should have been spoiled. He hoped he would not walk again in his sleep, but he could not at all be sure. One fortunate circumstance was that Urmila was accustomed to his walking, or had been accustomed; but it was

a pity all the same that her sleep should be disturbed.

That night Bellal's cries and moans increased, became louder, and Sen walked in his sleep again, and walked further. Urmila found him this time near the compound wall looking fixedly in the direction of Sikshamook. Next morning, he was, as before, completely unconscious of his nocturnal wanderings, but had a clearer memory of his dreams most of which centred round the rock. He was, indeed, more distressed than ever that their holiday was being spoilt in this manner.

Nothing of note happened that day. Mr. Bellal seemed even busier than usual with his interviews and inquiries. A continuous stream of visitors seemed to besiege his side of the bungalow.

Sen and Urmila strolled out in the evening, and did a brisk five miles, returning with enormous appetites. At dinner, unseen by his wife, Sen mixed a sleeping draught with her lemonade, so as to ensure her rest that night at least, and a little later took one himself. As a result, Urmila slept soundly all night. The only effect the draught seemed to have on him was to render his dreams more vivid and wonderful. He certainly remembered them very distinctly the next morning. He

seemed to begin dreaming almost the moment he closed his eyes.

At first, he appeared to be walking along the crowded streets of a strange but large and populous city. Although it was night the people seemed to be all out of doors, and in a very excited condition. They were all shouting and gesticulating in a strange tongue, which though difficult to follow, was not unfamiliar; and all of them seemed to be going in one direction. From what he could gather, it seemed that somebody had organized a plot against the King's life, an act of Treason, which having been discovered, was to be punished from the Sikskamookh. This, he learned, was not so frequent an affair as it had been of old. Indeed, few in that generation had witnessed such an execution, the last one having taken place twenty nine years before. Their King, who professed to be civilized, had, it seemed, on his accession to the throne, signalized his emancipation from barbarism by a decree that all executions should thenceforward be conducted in the town itself, by an executioner equipped with an axe; but the present case was exceptional, and as the King wanted to make an example of the traitor (who turned out in the end to be a distant relation of His Majesty),

the old Rock, which could be seen far away towering in the moonlight, was to be the scene of action.

As the crowd jostled him along, Sen became infected with the excitement. Presently, he entered what seemed a large square, already filled to its fullest capacity with people. Near to him was a high scaffolding on which was a broad platform covered with black, and as he entered, a trumpet was blown three times, presumably to call for silence. A man in a dazzling uniform then stepped forward, and unrolling a large scroll proceeded to read out in a loud voice what seemed to Sen like a list of the crimes of the offender, as well as the punishment which the King had decided should be inflicted on him. By the side of this herald, in a kind of cage, stood, or rather crouched, the criminal; and as he looked at the man, their eyes met, and you may imagine Sen's astonishment when he recognised in him *no less a person than Mr. Bellal, the Deputy Superintendent of Police!*

The expression on his face was one of anguish and terror, and Sen turned his eyes away very much puzzled to account for this marvellous coincidence. Soon, the proclamation came to an end, with a vigorous exhortation to the citizens to be loyal and true, and was received with a great

shout, which showed how heartily the people approved of the retribution decreed for the traitor. The cage with its victim was then swung on to an elephant, which proceeded to make its way through the crowd. The procession then slowly began to move forward, Sen along with it, down the streets and up the side of the hill, to where the Rock of Doom waited in the silent night. That slow walk uphill was a nightmare, but in the end they reached the summit, and Sen forced his way to the nearest place he could reach on the Rock. Far below, a myriad lights twinkled in the valley, showing the city which he had just left. Truly a great and a magnificent city, he thought.

The ceremony he witnessed on the rock there, was simple, but impressive. The cage was carried to the foot of a tall post planted at the very edge of the rock, and from which a rope dangled. To this, the cage was fastened at its four upper corners, its occupant whimpering and moaning all the while for mercy. A number of priests then ranged themselves about it, and chanted a long mournful dirge, which grew louder and more appealing in tone as it came to an end in a shrill crescendo of cries, that died sadly away amongst the answering hills.

The cage was next swung up, so that it hung suspended over the edge of the cliff above the heads of all, and every eye was strained upon the figure of the condemned man, who sprawled on the bottom of it in a sudden access of helpless terror. Then, while every spectator held his breath, the chief of the priests stepped forward, and raising his hands above his head, uttered three times in a loud voice, so that all could hear:

**"FOR TREACHERY, DISLOYALTY
AND TREASON! KNOW ALL!
HOW THE KING PUNISHES!"**

And as the words rang out for the third time, the bottom of the cage seemed to drop out, and its occupant went hurtling down the precipice, while such a shriek burst forth from his lips as would have raised the dead.

The piercing scream of the victim as he fell, rent the night air, and seemed to be echoed from a hundred places. It made the blood in Sen's veins tingle, and it was with this sound in his ears that he woke suddenly to find himself standing only a few feet from the terrible precipice. For a moment he reeled with the suddenness of the shock; then everything came back to him. Instinctively he

looked about for the vast concourse which had witnessed the execution along with him, but the moon threw its pale light on rock and grass alone. Next, he looked down into the valley, but where a short while ago had been the blaze of a great and wonderful city, now all was dim, and only the river shone like dull lead in the distance. Then he carefully approached the edge of the rock and looked down into the depths, but he saw only the moon-blanchèd earth far far below, and heard nothing but the mournful wind as it sighed past him.

Suddenly, with a shudder, he realised that he had been dreaming, as well as sleep-walking. Trembling to think how near destruction he had come, he picked his way thoughtfully back to the bungalow. Passing by Mr. Bellal's room he noticed that all was quiet. Urmila too was sleeping soundly and peacefully. For that at least he was thankful

Both he and Urmila awoke later than usual the next morning, she, refreshed and feeling better for the peaceful night she had spent, he, none the worse for his midnight adventure, but with a startlingly vivid recollection of his dream. For some time, he was in two minds about telling Urmila about it, but in the end he decided to do so, partly

because he had made up his mind to leave the bungalow and move on to another, a few miles further away. He had come to the conclusion that Mr. Bellal was right, and that there was something eerie about this place, which was responsible perhaps for his somnambulistic relapse.

Urmila heard a graphic description of her husband's dream, and shuddered, poor thing, to think what a narrow escape he had had from walking right over the Mookh. His idea of leaving the place, made, therefore, a ready appeal to her, and she fell in with the plan only too gladly.

And so, within an hour of breakfast, they packed up and were ready to depart. As they were leaving, Sen noticed quite a crowd of persons waiting to see Mr. Bellal, who, he thought, had evidently another busy day before him. Not wishing to go away without bidding good-bye to him, he looked into his room with that purpose in mind, but found he was not in. Calling up one of the orderlies, he asked him where his master was.

The man saluted smartly. "Not knowing Sar" he said. "Supraint not return from morning round. Come soon now Sar" he added, "Already too late getting."

"Oh well!" said Sen turning away, "I shan't wait for him. Better to leave a note saying goodbye." And this he did.

So it was that Urmila and Sen went away to Bidrigolle, where they found an excellent little bungalow, as tidy and well-kept as one could wish for, set on the summit of a stretch of rolling up-land, and commanding delicious views of the surrounding green-carpeted hills. Here they were perfectly happy, and at ease. Urmila's restlessness vanished, and Sen's somnambulistic tendencies disappeared as marvellously as they had asserted themselves. For three days they had a splendid time of it.

It was on the evening of the third day that news reached them of the death of Mr. Bellal, and of how his body, crushed and mangled out of recognition, had been discovered at the foot of Sikshamookh late in the afternoon of the very day they had left the Purugur Bungalow. Urmila and Sen looked at each other with horrified eyes. It was Urmila who first found her tongue.

"Your dream!" she cried, "Your dream! it was true!"

Sen shivered at the recollection. "It must have been," he said.

True or not, the joy seemed to have gone out of their holiday, and they decided to return home. They did so, the next morning, by a rather round-about route which they took so as to avoid the scene of the tragedy.

My story, as I need hardly say, ends here. The facts are as I have stated them, make of them what you will. It is no business of mine to go further. But I may perhaps frame two questions which no doubt have already suggested themselves to you.

In the first place, how did Bellal come by his death? Was it an accident, as represented at the inquest?—Or was it suicide?—Or again, was it murder?—

Secondly, what is to be made of Sen's dream? What was the city which he visited? And what relation do the events of his dream bear to the tragedy that actually occurred?

Sen, if you ask him, will swear to you that he was actually on the spot when poor Bellal met his death. He will laugh at you if you suggest that it was either an accident or a case of suicide, and will express his firm belief that it was really a case of Retribution. He will remind you of the legend of the city of Ghosts that came to life once every

The Second Honeymoon

twelve years for the space of one night. He will also explain to you his curious theory that the ghosts had revenged themselves upon Bellal for the part he had played in attempting to prove the guilt of one of his own kindred.

However that may be, the fact remains that as a result of Bellal's death the case against the descendant of the Jain kings broke down completely. As I said, if you do not believe in the supernatural, you will probably laugh at my story, and laugh at Sen too and his sleep-walking dreams. Personally, I shouldn't mind your laughter at all, because, as I told you, I keep an open mind myself on the subject; but I shouldn't advise you to do it before Sen, because he is rather touchy on the subject.





PACHECO'S STORY

“Wisdom,” observed Pacheco to me the other day, and Pacheco is nothing if not wise, “is the essence of foolishness!” It was our usual evening walk, and I could see that my friend was inclined to be sententious.

“Pacheco,” I said, looking slyly up at his venerable profile, “if that is true, you must have been very foolish in your time!”

“Very!” said Pacheco. “However, I was not thinking of myself but of Shamun and Mini, when I made that statement. The story—”

“If Pacheco is about to tell a story,” interrupted Viswanath, our Munsiff, who sometimes joined

Pacheco's Story

us in our stroll, and had on this occasion come up unawares, "then surely I am in luck. And what an exquisite evening too! Come Pacheco, I am just in the mood for a story!"

"And so am I," I added, "besides I am very curious to know who this Shamun and Mini are."

"The view from that hill, over there," said Pacheco, pointing to an eminence a mile away, "is marvellous beyond description. I will tell you all about Shamun on the way."

And so we walked on, Pacheco's majestic and austere figure between us; and I dare say the people who turned their heads to look back at him imagined that he was delivering a discourse on religion to two of his disciples. At any rate, they could scarcely have suspected that he was merely relating a pathetic little story of love. But I anticipate.

"Shamun," began Pacheco, "is rather an odd contraction for Lakshmanan, but I have known the boy ever since he was a year old, and he has never been called anything else, in the circle, that is, of his friends and his relations. His father, who is at present Sub-Judge in a place that shall be nameless, is an old and valued friend, and Shamun, his only son, has been a particular favourite of mine.

A beautiful little boy he used to be, with curly hair, and sparkling mischievous eyes, and many are the incidents that crowd into my mind of the merry times we have had together. 'Cho-cho' he used to call me in the days when he could do little more than lisp, and 'Cho-cho' I am to him still. Well, he grew up into a fine strapping lad that did your eyes good to look upon, and astonished us all by his pluck and daring, and although we were rather alarmed at first at the high spirit thus manifested, we could not but admire him all the more for it, particularly as we always found him generous to a fault, and so good-tempered. I don't think even his father was so proud of him as I was. I still have a very perfect recollection of the day he received news of having passed his Intermediate examination, and how elated he was at the idea of joining a college in Madras. And to Madras he went, full of hope and expectation, leaving behind no one more sorrowful than myself. Well, Providence tempers the wind, it is said, to the shorn lamb. Three weeks after Shamun left us, I received news of the death of a niece in Bombay. She died bequeathing to my care her sole daughter, a girl of sixteen, who had just passed the Matriculation examination. I was only too glad,

as you may imagine, to give a home to the motherless girl, and Mini, from the day she entered my household, was complete mistress of it. Indeed, she was so pretty and had such a charming smile, and such winning ways, that nobody could resist her. We were only too glad to do the least service for her, and from the very first I fell completely under the fascination of her grave dark eyes, and her shy sweet manner. Almost immediately, she assumed the reins of government in my household —you know what a lonely life mine has been!—and I can hardly put in words the difference her presence made in the home. She and I were a great deal together, and it was not long before I discovered that she was as wise as she was beautiful. But what impressed me even more was her quiet gravity, her womanly sweetness and simplicity.

“‘Grandfather,’ she said to me one day—it was two weeks after her arrival, and we were sitting out on the verandah of my little house just before retiring to bed. ‘Who is Shamun?’”

I was so startled by the suddenness of the question that I was unable to reply to it for a whole minute. Also, I was conscious of a sense of guilt. Mini had so occupied my attention during these days that Shamun had insensibly retired into the back-ground.

“‘The other day,’ continued Mini before I could speak, ‘I was dusting and arranging your table, when I came across a photograph, and underneath it was written, in such a bad hand, I could scarcely read it, *To Cho-cho from Shamun*. He looked such a nice boy, I have been wanting to ask you about him ever since.’ And her great dark eyes looked interrogatively at me.

“‘Mini,’ I said, looking down at her, for she sat on the ground with her head resting on my knees, ‘Shamun is a very dear friend; he is my god-son in fact. At present he is away at college in Madras. He brought me that photograph the day before he went away.’

“‘And he calls you Cho-cho, grand-father?’ asked Mini next. ‘What a pretty name! May I call you that too?’

“‘Of course you may, my dear,’ I said stroking her soft cheek. ‘In fact I should prefer it.’ She was silent for a long time after that, gazing wistfully at the stars, but her voice was very tender when she said good-night to me. ‘Good-night, Cho-cho,’ she murmured, pressing my hand to her cheek, and rising, went swiftly indoors. And that is how I came to be Cho-cho to both these young people.”

We had in the meantime arrived at the foot of

the hill from which Pacheco had promised us so pleasing a view. We climbed to the top in silence, and indeed the panorama that lay spread out before us as we stood with our backs to the sweeping winds, was magnificent. I turned almost with a sigh from the contemplation of the endless succession of green-clothed valleys and hills, amidst which, a river of purest gold wound like a snake.

"Now for the rest of your story, Pacheco," I said, "we shall sit under that beautiful banyan and listen to it. So we shall have this wonderful view before us all the time."

"Yes," agreed Viswanath almost gratefully, for he appeared to be a trifle out of breath. "Yes. I am most eager to hear what happened to these young people when they met."

"The usual thing, of course," said Pacheco, when we had seated ourselves in the shade of the tree I had pointed out. I was most curious myself about the result. I will not deny that I had already begun to cherish a hope—you know what I mean! Well, the very day that Shamen returned from Madras for his holidays, he met Mini, and I could see it was a case of love at first sight for both. Most people have no belief in this kind of thing nowadays, Cupid and his quiver being quite out of

fashion in an age of mental processes and psycho-analysis. However, Shamun and Mini were old-fashioned, I suppose, and they fell in love with each other madly from the very beginning. They contrived to meet almost every day, and were miserable when apart. With every morn their love grew tenderer, with every eve deeper and tenderer still; he might not in house, field, or garden stir, but her full shape would all his seeing fill, and his continual voice was pleasanter to her than noise of trees or hidden till. I am quoting, of course; Keats, if I am not mistaken. Anyhow it is not a subject I wish to dilate upon. The symptoms are well known, and have been accurately recorded by poets of all ages and all nations. But you are wrong if you imagine that everything went as smoothly and happily as it should have gone. Few things in this world happen exactly as we would have them. A good thing too when you come to think of it. In this particular case there was trouble from the very start. Shamun's father, when he got wind of the affair, was furious; Shamun's mother was scarcely less distracted. There was a scene. Tears, entreaties, threats, commands, defiance, tears again, the weary round of all domestic broil. The whole blame, naturally, fell on my shoulders. I did my

best to bring my old friend to look at the position from a different point of view. But he was adamant, and I nearly lost my temper. The upshot of the affair was that Shamen went back to college two days sooner than he would have otherwise, and a more pitiful countenance than his at the time of saying farewell to me, I have never seen, and have no wish to see.

“‘Cho-cho,’ he said, and the tears were not far away, though I could see he was trying to be very brave. ‘Cho-cho, you must do what you can with my father. He seems very hard—and mother! I don’t understand—’”

“‘Everything will come right,’ I said attempting to be cheerful, ‘leave it to me. And don’t let this interfere with your studies.’”

“Nothing like good advice in season, you know, even though you feel it is not going to be taken. Well, it was three months’ hard work to get over the prejudices of the boy’s parents, but I managed it in the end; though looking back on things now, I think it was Mini who did the trick, really. They took such a liking to her, and that helped to smooth things out ever so much. The next time Shamen came back from Madras, peace had been established and a happier couple you could not

think of. They read poetry all day, a thing Shamun had had a healthy abhorrence of until then, and when they had nothing else to do, looked into each other's eyes, and were content. Strange proceedings, I admit, and certainly looked askance at by everybody else. But that is love, I suppose."

There was quite a tender light in Pacheco's eyes, as he paused to follow the flight of a hawk wheeling in the blue sky over the green valley that lay beneath us.

"I am afraid," he went on, "that I do not get along fast enough with my story. But love is a subject that always has moved me to the depths. To resume, however. The sky of our young lovers was as bright and cloudless as the one before us, and it was decided that they should be married directly after Shamun took his degree, which meant a year of waiting, but it was a year that sped by on rosy hours. Shamun wrote long letters to Mini, none of which the little minx showed me, but I could tell how happy she was; and she replied to them doubtless at equal length. We will skip over this period as it was interesting only to the two chiefly concerned, and I will ask you to imagine them within a month of the happy day. Not a cloud to disturb their happiness, mind, when Shamun's

mother was suddenly attacked by a malignant fever. She was seriously ill for quite a number of days, and it was a very anxious period for everybody. But the day came, when the doctor pronounced her to be out of danger, and as fate would have it, it was the very day on which Shamun's marriage was to have been celebrated. You can very well imagine what a relief the recovery was to everyone concerned, and how in the joy of it most other things were forgotten. Not so the marriage, of course, which having been postponed, was now fixed for another day. The delay, a matter of six weeks or so, did not mean much. But the fates were very hard upon these two lovers, for within a fortnight of this second day, the mother sickened again (a relapse, the doctor called it), nor did she survive this new attack. Death came, the irony of it is very strange, on the exact day, almost in the exact hour for which the marriage had been fixed, and I will leave to your imagination the misery it brought in its train. Shamun's father was prostrated with sorrow. Shamun himself was almost frantic with grief, for he had been tenderly attached to his mother; and Mini, poor little Mini, nearly broke her heart with the pain of seeing her beloved suffer.

The strain, however, proved too great for Shamun, and it was he who took to his bed next. Half way through his illness Mini too was laid up. The next to fall ill was Shamun's father. A very unhappy time it was, very, very unhappy."

The recollection of it appeared to overcome Pacheco, for he stopped, and almost fell into a reverie. I did not like to disturb him, but Viswanath seemed to have no such scruples.

"Hurry up, Pacheco," he exclaimed, "or else there will be an epidemic very soon."

This brought Pacheco to with a start, but he smiled at the witticism. "Yes," he said, apparently taking up my friend's thought, "though not quite; I was taken ill too, but we all recovered. Yet what a hopeless, grey world it was, particularly for Shamun and Mini, to which we returned! The marriage, of course, had to be postponed again. For a year, at the very least, it was unthinkable. The problem was what Shamun should do in the meantime. It was the doctor who solved this. He insisted on a complete change for Shamun, who had suffered most from the attack, and hinted at a voyage among other things. So, very suddenly, it was settled that Shamun should go to England to continue

is studies at Oxford. It was also decided that he should return to us for his first long vacation, and then if all things went well, he could be married to Mini. Quite a month was taken up in making reparations for Shamun's departure, but it passed all too soon. I will draw a veil over the anguish of the two lovers at parting. It nearly broke their hearts For days, after Shamun had left us, Mini was as one dead. She went about the house like a ghost, with pale drawn face, and eyelids heavy with weight of unshed tears. Poor thing, it is pitiable to see her suffer so. But there was no help for it. The worst of our sorrows are such as we have to be endured alone. I daresay Shamun was exactly the same condition. At any rate, his first letters posted at Aden, conveyed that impression. You will naturally imagine that Mini thereafter died in the letters that she received, and that May became the most important day in the week. It is so. Within a few weeks, to all outward appearances, Mini had become her old self, not quite so sorry, perhaps, and apt to be a little dreamy at times, but still Mini. She was very often with Shamun's father, and indeed it looked as though a common loss had brought the two very close together."

“Well,” continued Pacheco, after a slight pause, “six months went by in this more or less negative fashion, and Shamun sent us every week glowing accounts of Oxford, his life there, the friends he had made, everything in fact which he thought would interest us. And then, almost imperceptibly, we began to perceive a change in the spirit of his letters; a certain want of warmth, of freshness, of candour, became gradually noticeable, until we were no longer in any doubt of it, for his once voluminous messages grew scantier and scantier, dwindled into irregularity, and then stopped altogether. Mini, of course, was the first to notice the change. I well remember the day she came to me with a grave troubled face, and stood by my chair, quite unable to put into words that which she wanted to say. ‘Mini, my child,’ I said, startled by the pallor of her countenance, ‘what is the matter? You look very ill!’”

“‘I am not ill, Cho-cho,’ she replied, with a pitiful smile—‘O how it went to my heart, that smile!—‘I only want to know whether Shamun has written to you this week.’”

“‘No,’ I said, ‘not this week; but he has written to *you*, hasn’t he?’”

“‘No, Cho-cho,’ she replied, and I saw the tears start into her eyes at the words. ‘It is three weeks

now since I received a letter from him. What can be the matter with him?'"

"Nothing at all, my dear," I said, taking her hand and patting it, "but, if you are very anxious, we can cable to him and find out what is wrong." Poor girl! Of course she was very anxious! We were all very anxious. So cable we did. No reply came, but I received a letter by the very next mail, in which Shamun wished me to tell his father that his tutors were against his returning home for the summer holidays, and that he himself had decided to put off his return until a more convenient opportunity presented itself. Not a word about Mini, mind, in the whole of the letter. It put me into such a passion—I do not think I have ever been so angry in my life! It was easy enough to read between the lines. The boy's head had been turned by something or somebody, and the old ties that had bound him, the old affections, had fallen away. Is it not strange that a few brief months should have worked so great a change? I carried the letter to the boy's father without delay, and it put him into nearly as great a rage as I had been in.

"If things are as we suspect," he said, after he had cooled down a little, "something has to be done at

once. But what on earth are we to do? O, curse the day I decided to send the fool to England."

"Think of that poor girl, Pacheco," he burst out immediately afterwards, "think of the suffering this is going to cause her. O the scamp! the scamp!"

"My dear old friend," I said, "let us not do anything hastily. It does look like a bad case, but let us not make it worse by acting precipitately. We will think over this matter for a day, and then come to a decision. Meanwhile, we will say nothing to Mini. I will see you again early in the morning tomorrow." And so I left him to try and think out for myself a solution to our difficulty. It was my friend himself who provided the solution. He burst into my room late that very evening.

"Pacheco," he said with a fierce thump on the table, "I know what I am going to do. I am going to send that girl to England to find out what is wrong. She has fifty times the sense he has, and if anybody can bring him round, it's she." This tribute to Mini's powers would have been very pleasing but for the gravity of the situation. At first I was apprehensive of the results of such a course of action as that suggested by my friend, but I was soon

brought round to see things with his eyes, and we decided that it was the best thing to do under the circumstances. I will not dwell on Mini's grief, when we put the matter before her, nor upon her doubts and fears when we told her what we had resolved upon doing. Like the very plucky girl she was, she agreed very soon to our plans. You probably wonder how we could think of sending a girl all by herself to such a distant country as England. I assure you it was a real difficulty with us, but happily for us and for Mini, it so happened that a Zamindar friend of mine and his wife decided just about this time to go to Europe—a thing they had long been wanting to do, and they were only too glad to take charge of Mini as far as London. In fact, they were quite enthusiastic about the venture, when they heard the whole story. I was happy to think that Mini was in such good hands, and indeed, they proved very kind and helpful friends to her. And so Mini too went away from us."

"This is becoming quite exciting," said Viswanath looking at Pacheco, who had paused reflectively, "it reminds me of the fairy story in which the little maiden coming from market drops one of her rolls of butter down the hill, and then sends

the remaining one after it to find out where the first one went."

"Ha, ha, my friend," said Pacheco, "wait till you hear the end of my story and you will see then what wisdom there is even in fairy tales. To resume, Mini's friends were so good as to go with her to Oxford, but they happened to arrive a week before the beginning of the summer term, and so found that Shamus was not in residence. But in that week they were able to get a great deal of information as to Shamus's doings. He had been quite steady at the beginning, but had been seen of late very much in the company of a young lady, whom further investigation revealed to be a fascinating widow with artistic pretensions, a very disquieting fact in itself. It was clear, of course, that his new surroundings had completely altered the boy's outlook, and that he had forgotten Mini under the spell of this new woman. On the day term commenced, he returned to college along with the three thousand or so other undergraduates who constitute the active life of the University. Shamus (I had all the particulars from my friend) was greatly surprised and confused at his first meeting with Mini, but tried to bluff it out, and when that failed, grew sulky; altogether, his behaviour was

most unsatisfactory. The next day Mini received a letter from him asking her pardon for the distress he had caused her, but giving her to understand very definitely that everything was over between them, so far as he was concerned. He said that he felt he was unworthy of her, and hoped that she would forget him. Well, here was a pretty problem. What was Mini to do next? My friend advised me that the best course would be for her to join one of the ladies' colleges, and await further developments; and in accordance with this suggestion she entered Somerville. So there were Shamun and Mini both at the same University, and as it turned out a little later, attending the same lectures."

"Six months went by," continued Pacheco, "during which Mini saw very little of Shamun, who was more, or seemed more than ever in the coils of the artistic widow. But with the beginning of the Michaelmas term, they met each other constantly at lectures, and though each evinced at first a desire to avoid the other, they soon became, strange as it may seem, almost friendly. It was Shamun who made the first advance."

"'Mini,' he said, one day, when they happened to be walking back to their respective homes after

a lecture, 'I know you have a lot to forgive me for, but I don't see why we shouldn't forget the past, and be friends.'"

"'Yes, Shamun,' said Mini, looking straight in front of her, and walking a little quicker.

"'I mean,' went on Shamun, 'It's jolly uncomfortable always to be cutting one another, and behaving generally like little kiddies, what?'"

"'O quite,' said Mini, plucking up spirit, but still looking straight before her. 'Besides, I forgave you ages ago. Do let us be friends. I for my part shall be very pleased.'"

"And they shook hands on that. Mini, you see, had schooled herself to the new conditions. She was still very much in love with Shamun, (women are like that, my friends), and had resolved to win him back somehow or other, only she did not quite know how, as yet. And then as the days passed, and Shamun, though now on very friendly terms with her, continued under the enchantment of the widow, she was struck by an idea which seemed to offer a possible solution to her difficulty. You must not forget that Mini was a very pretty girl, and that like all pretty girls she had many friends and admirers. Moreover her nationality gave her an additional charm, invested her with a

mysterious attraction. Also, the ugliness of the other Indian girls at the University served as a foil to her startling beauty. Her wonderful sarees caught the eyes of the undergraduates and held them fascinated. Altogether, she had a host of admirers, and among them, one, more zealous than the rest, whom her eyes had detected, a boy named Roberts, who belonged to the same college as Shamun, and well-known as a particular friend of the latter. 'I shall be very nice to Roberts,' she said to herself, 'He is a nice boy, and deserves a little encouragement.' You see, I suppose, what the minx had in mind, and it worked beautifully. Roberts, who was very chummy with Shamun, had never concealed his admiration for Mini from him, and Mini's 'niceness' which had made him wildly happy, was faithfully detailed to his friend. The news, to Shamun, was not a little disquieting. It became more and more so, as the days rolled by, and each day brought evidence of the progress Roberts seemed to make in Mini's affections. One may conjecture, perhaps, the state of mind in which he was. It is possible that the renewal of his acquaintance with Mini had served to revive old memories and to fill him with a tender interest in her welfare; it is possible that he

dreaded the logical outcome of this attachment which he found increasing under his very eyes; it is possible, that he had particular objections to Roberts in the role of Mini's lover, but this could hardly be, as he himself had a great affection for the fellow; it is possible that he disapproved of mixed flirtations of this character, though that would have been very unreasonable, of course, in the light of his own action, but in these things there has always been one law for the man and quite another for the woman; it is possible again—but no, the devil take the thought, he certainly was not jealous of Roberts. All that nonsense of his youth was over and done with. So, perhaps, I say, Shamun, argued the matter over in his own mind. But, whatever the case may have been, there was no doubt he was greatly disturbed. He simply did not like it. 'I must see Mini about this,' he decided to himself at last, 'and have a talk with her. It's going beyond a joke. The silly fool has lost her head.'"

"He happened to meet Mini the very next day at the Cadena, a much frequented restaurant in the heart of the city, where underfed members of the University sit over coffee and indigestible pastry, in between lectures in the morning. She

was sitting alone in a corner gazing down upon the busy street below, when Shamun went up and took the seat opposite hers."

"' Hallo Shamun,' she said, smiling brightly at him, and Shamun noted how wonderfully pretty she looked in her saree of scarlet and gold, 'you look rather worried, old thing. Whatever is the matter?'

"' Mini,' said Shamun, feeling more disturbed than ever, and going straight to the point, 'What is all this nonsense about Roberts? The whole place is talking about you two.'"

"' Is it?' asked Mini very demurely, but exulting greatly at heart, 'I am sorry it can find nothing better to talk about. Try one of these cakes. The pink ones are awfully good. I have just eaten three.'"

"' It's true then, what they say?' Shamun asked, ignoring the cakes.

"' I don't know what right you have to ask me that,' said Mini, calmly sipping her coffee.

"' What right? The right of a friend, of course. I thought we were friends. O Mini, I didn't think you would say such a thing.'"

"' Shamun,' said Mini, laying down her cup. 'Let's cut all that sentimental stuff out. We

agreed to do so, you remember. We are no longer boy and girl, and all that foolishness is over, isn't it? Besides your attitude is rather curious. You forget that this is a game that two can play at. If you object to my being friendly with Roberts, though I don't see what business it is of yours, well—what about Mrs. Melton, with whom you are so thick?"

"O hang!" muttered Shuman, and rising abruptly, left her; which was of course neither friendly nor polite. But he was in a temper, and this accounted perhaps for the glowering silence in which he passed Roberts on the stairs, ignoring his eager 'Is she in there, old fellow?' It hardly accounted, however, for his quarrel with Roberts two days later, when the most unpleasant things were said, and both Mini's and Edith Melton's names were dragged in. Reviewing the situation to himself a week later, he decided that this state of things could not go on for long. 'Dash it all,' he thought, 'I must be falling in love with that girl again. Edith is all right, but there are times when I think she is not a patch on Mini. And of late she has been hanging back a bit. I wonder if it is that fellow in Jesus. These women,' he concluded, 'are the very devil.' There, of course,

he was probably right. But it didn't help him a bit.

"And then the fates who had so long played with these two mortals decided they had done so long enough. I cannot account in any other way for the accident that befell Shamen within the next fortnight. Walking down the High one evening, with his hands deep in his pockets, brooding disconsolately over his unhappiness, he was run into by a badly driven car from behind. When he regained consciousness ten days later he found himself in hospital, and could not, try as he would, imagine how he had got there. He fell asleep again still trying. I will hurry over his period of recovery, although at the beginning there had been grave doubts of that. During this period his most constant visitor was Mini, whose sweetness and tenderness were like balm to his spirit. Sometimes he wondered why Edith never came to see him at all. The explanation for that, he discovered in a county paper a kind nurse brought to him the day he was allowed to sit up in bed.

**PRETTY WIDOW ELOPES
WITH
JESUS UNDERGRADUATE**

he read, and below this bold heading, an interesting account of the romance. He did not read that

account, nor did he turn over to the picture-page to look at the photographs of the adventurous couple . . . The hot tears gushed from his eyes and blurred everything. Flinging the paper away he turned and pressed his face to the pillows and wept like a child for very weakness. But the first burst was soon over, and when he grew more composed and collected, he was able to think things over and put them in their proper perspective. He had had many opportunities during the long days and the longer nights of his enforced seclusion, to reason with himself, to weigh and to consider the events of the past two years. What a fool he had been! What a tremendous fool! He had left the substance for the shadow, and now he had lost both, and made a mess of his whole life. Poor Mini, he thought, how she must have suffered! How happy they had been before he had come away to England! Every detail of those tender love-filled hours came back to him, each with a stab of intolerable pain. And now he had lost her. She loved Roberts. He had quarrelled with Roberts too. How sick he was of life! 'O Mini, Mini,' he moaned with his hands to his face, 'O my darling can you ever forgive me!'"

Pacheco's Story

"There was a rustle by his side. Mini had entered silently. She had heard these last words, and the tears were in her eyes, but they were happy tears.

"'Shamun, you silly boy,' she said, 'I forgave you long ago.' And then seeing the dazed look in his eyes, she bent down, and put her arms round him.

"I will not linger over their explanations," continued Pacheco, "they have no interest at all. Shamun and Mini spent another year at Oxford—that is, until Shamun took his degree, and then they returned to us. Within a week of their return they were married."

"Ah, yes," I said, "All tragedies are ended in a marriage. That's the way the world over."

"Byron! Byron!" exclaimed Pacheco, apostrophising a pale wisp of cloud that sailed slowly by above us, "You little know the mischief you have done!" Then turning to me, "O you wretch, if I had said that you would have called me a cynic and come down upon me. Anyhow Shamun and Mini are very happy at present, and we will leave them so. Besides it is very late."

And that is how Pacheco told us his story.





FULFILMENT

If you don't play Bridge, there is nothing else you can do at the Gelmar Club during the rainy season, except talk. I don't say this in any disparaging sense, because we, the very exclusive members of this very exclusive institution, the like of which I would have you understand is not to be found anywhere else, feel that there is nothing objectionable in such an arrangement. We all sit sociably together, the seven or eight of us who foregather most evenings, in one corner of the immense verandah, and what with one thing and another, generally contrive to get a good deal of fun out of each other. The conditions are certainly

not ideal for Bridge, but then you can't have everything.

On the particular evening to which my story takes me back, the "Big Four" as we used to call the Policeman, the Munsiff, the Tax-gatherer, and the Sub-Judge (mostly for their outsizes in corporations), were in their accustomed places at the card-table under the lamp. A little to their left, at what was humorously called "The Second Class Table," sat a more ruthless trio trying their very hardest to cut each other's throats. Between them, and in the most convenient position for conversation with both groups, lounged Jungly and I. Jungly, as you have no doubt guessed, is our Forest man. He is by way of being a wit, and Bridge being anathema to both of us, we are sworn brothers in arms, at least in the Club.

Jungly, I remember, had been telling me (and all others who cared to listen) of an astrologer who had come to him with a printed book of testimonials, which included letters of appreciation from persons of no less distinction than Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Robert Baden Powell, Lord Northcliffe and Dadhabai Naoroji.

"And what did you do with the fellow?" I enquired.

“Nothing,” said Jungly, “I told him that there were one or two members of the club who would be very pleased to meet him, and asked him to come round here this evening. He may be here now.”

On enquiry, however, it proved that he was not.

Well, there was a lull in our talk after that, and we were reduced temporarily to the agony of merely listening to the insipid remarks that came from both sides of us.

“Four down!” cried one of the murderers to our left.

“If you had only played that ace earlier,” exclaimed Rangiah, the Sub-Judge, in an annoyed tone, “we should have made our contract.” This was addressed to Cariappa, his partner, our Superintendent of Police, who, I should explain here, is inclined to take rather a more active part in our conversation than his partners approve of, and consequently makes fearful blunders in his play. Rangiah, being serious-minded, and rather slow in the up-take, is the least tolerant of his critics.

“Sorry,” said Cariappa, “I forgot I had it with me, listening to Jungly’s nonsense.”

“You must play when you play,” said Rangiah ominously.

The arrival of "Double-Breadth," our Coffee magnate and Municipal Chairman, created an agreeable diversion. His real name is Don Felix Alfonso de Rebeiro D'Almada Castelino de Rodriguez, and he measures fifteen yards to the suit. "Double-Breadth" is therefore much more expressive. An extraordinarily shrewd fellow. Amusing and pleasant withal.

We greeted him with delight for he was one of the talkers, and loathed Bridge almost as much as we did. Rather prosy and self-conscious, but still one of the talkers. He told the most wonderful stories.

Seating himself cautiously, he produced a cigar from one of his pockets, extracted a box of matches from another, and proceeded to light up. This, however, he found to be no easy matter, for the damp had got into the box, and match after match was thrown away, after a fruitless scrape.

"Ridiculous!" he exclaimed in disgust. "Sheer waste of money. The fellows who sell these matches ought to be prosecuted." Even as he spoke one flared up in his fingers.

"No bid," said Rangiah morosely from our right.

"Why don't you get a cigar lighter?" asked Jungly, after D. B. had settled back in his chair. "It's so easy to make one."

"Three diamonds!" cried a brigand to our left.

"Is it?" asked Double-Breadth, who, as everyone knows, is immensely rich but miserably stingy. "And how is it done may I know?"

"Easiest thing in the world," said Jungly. "Take a box of cigars, remove one cigar from it, and your box then becomes a cigar lighter!"

"Eh—Oh I see!" And D. B. creased his face into a grin. "Call that a joke I suppose?"

"Oh, but that's damn good!" shouted Cariappa the incorrigible. "Damn good! I say have you heard this one? What is the difference between a postage mistress and a school stamp? No, I've got that wrong—I mean—"

"How the devil can one play Bridge if this kind of thing goes on!" exclaimed Rangiah, rasping back his chair, and making as if to throw his hand down. "I refuse to play. I refuse to play. It is too bad." And turning to us he raked us fore and aft (as though we were the culprits) with an eye, which, if looks could kill, would have annihilated us on the spot.

"I don't know what you expect us to do," said Jungly sweetly, taking up the all but unspoken challenge, and speaking up for us, "Sit here and dream?"

"Talking of dreams," said Double-Breadth, with that delightful inconsequence which is one of his most amiable characteristics, "talking of dreams, I had a most extraordinary dream the other day. Most curious. I am sure you would all f you like to hear it. So why not stop play for a few minutes?"

"Hurrah!" shouted Jungly, and the cry being taken up with variations, each one turned in his seat to look at D. B., while Rangiah collapsed in his seat like a pricked balloon, muttering maledictions.

"A most peculiar dream," said D. B., sitting well back in his chair, and enjoying himself now that he had everybody's attention. "I had gone to bed as usual at 8. 30 with a mind completely blank. 'Also as usual,' said the irrepressible Jungly, but D. B. affected not to hear him). No worry you now, or anything of that sort. In a few moments I was fast asleep. I don't know when I began to dream, dreams being most unusual with me, but it must have been towards morning. I dreamed that I

was awake! Something had awakened me suddenly. Not any noise, so much as the feeling that somebody or something was in the room. Cautiously, I put my hand out for the electric torch I always keep on the little table near my head, but my action must have been observed, for there was a sudden snarl and a hairy body flung itself on me. Sharp claw-like hands gripped my throat. Wildly I hit out or tried to, but my arms seemed paralysed. In sheer terror, terror such as I have never imagined possible, terror all the greater because I could neither move nor see, I lay there trembling and sweating. How long I lay like this I cannot say. I must have swooned I suppose. Opening my eyes suddenly I found the room was now lighted up. And horror of horrors, the suffocating weight upon my chest was a huge hairy ape whose fetid breath and terrible fangs—ugh! I thought my last moment had come! The beast, however, was not looking at me, and following its gaze I beheld a man with a great scar on his back kneeling by my safe and actively transferring its contents into a bag that he held open with one hand. The sight made me so desperate that I could not restrain a cry. Exerting all my strength I tried to tear away the hands that held me down. There

was a snarl and a gnashing of teeth, and suddenly the lights went out. The fingers closed about my neck more and more tightly, until the agony became unbearable, and I relapsed into unconsciousness.—How do you like that for Instalment No. I?"

"Oh just an ordinary nightmare," said Cariappa, "You should eat less at night D. B., and go to bed later."

"You don't mean to say there's more to come, do you?" asked Rangiah.

"Another powerful instalment of this thrilling serial next week," murmured Jungly.

"More to come!" said D. B., leaning forward in his excitement, "I should say so. When I recovered from my swoon—all this, mind you, while still dreaming—I wasn't any longer in my bedroom, and it wasn't night either. You know how suddenly things change in dreams—"

"We do," Jungly solemnly assured him.

"Well, I wasn't in my room, and it wasn't night. It was broad daylight. And I was being carried in a kind of hammock, to a mournful sing-song *Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho*. At first I thought I was dead, and that they were taking my corpse to be buried. But I soon perceived this was not so.

I was alive, very much so, and able to take notice of things, only there was a devil of a pain in one leg, the left leg. Looking about me I noticed that we were going along a track that ran by the side of a great river. Everything was bright and beautiful, except my leg, and the cramped way in which I had to lie. Suddenly my bearers stopped.

"‘A crocodile! A crocodile!’ they shouted, and then in fear, ‘It’s coming this way, — brothers, it’s coming this way!’ Throwing the hammock from their shoulders, regardless in their hurry of its occupant, the cowardly rascals rushed away jabbering with fright. Bruised and shaken by my fall, and suffering agonies in my leg, I had just time to see an immense crocodile making straight for me. I could do nothing to get out of its way. In a moment it was on top of me, — and over me, if you understand what I mean. Jumped clean over me, and, flop, into the water alongside, with a mighty splash.” And D. B. sat back and mopped his streaming face with a huge red handkerchief.

“Go on. Why don’t you say it jumped back and swallowed you?” said Rangiah in evident disgust.

“And be done with it!” added one of the cut-throats.

“The fellow is pulling our legs,” said Cariappa, “That will do D. B. You’re a fine liar, you are.”

“Part III,” said Jungly, winking at me, “will follow immediately.”

“You people,” said D. B. in a patient tone, “don’t seem to realise that I am quite serious. Everything happened in my dream exactly as I have told you. When I recovered from my fright I found myself back in my hammock, and sing-singing along that apparently interminable path. Up hill, and down dale, we went, leaving the river behind us, along narrow gullies where the trees met above our head, and wading through long streams—not across, mind you, but down them, or so it seemed to me,—until I began to wonder whether we should ever stop.”

“Same as us,” said Rangiah with heavy sarcasm and forgetting his grammar.

“Like what-you-may-call-’ims brook eh,” commented Jungly, “I may come and he may go but you go on for ever.”

“Not exactly,” continued D. B., unruffled by these interruptions. “Not exactly, for presently we did stop. At a sort of island that seemed to rear itself out of the water, and on to which one climbed by a set of narrow slippery wooden steps.

Up these, and over a stile, my bearers took me. A few steps further, and they laid me down and bade me rise, pointing to the ground as if signifying that that was the spot to which I had wanted them to bring me, though God knows I had wanted nothing of the sort. Sitting up with some difficulty, and nursing the afflicted leg, the pain of which was by now even more excruciating, I looked about me, and what do you think I saw?"

"Another crocodile," said Cariappa promptly.

"No, a rhinoceros this time for a change," said Jungly.

"You will never guess," said D. B. "What I saw was a cluster of thatched huts - just like the pictures of African villages you see in the illustrated papers. In some were huge vats of bubbling oil. At the entrance to others, were groups of men with naked shiny bodies, some standing up, some lying on the ground, but all being kicked and pummelled in the strangest manner you ever saw. I have seen and read of different kinds of torture but never anything like this. The air was full of cries and shrieks of pain. At the entrance to the biggest hut of them all, surrounded by half a dozen of the wildest looking fellows, knelt a little

wizened man with an enormous paunch, holding by the elbow another who lay apparently in great pain on the ground, and making as though he were about to twist his arm off. The sight so sickened me that I turned away and would have risen and fled from this damned spot if I had been able. A piercing shriek, and I shuddered.—Another, and I turned to see the man, whose arm had been twisted, borne away into a hut from which issued clouds of smoke. Imagine my astonishment, when on carrying the man in, his back being turned to me for a moment, I saw here a great scar precisely like the one that had adorned the back of the fellow who had robbed my safe! What did it all mean?—Where was I?—Would they torture me too?—Had I fallen into the hands of cannibals?—Speechless with fright, lay there in an agony of apprehension, while the wizened little man, who now looked exactly like the photograph of a Nbgongo witch-doctor, approached me. Ruthlessly he turned me over, while one of his minions raised me up. Then suddenly he placed his right hand under my left leg, gave a twisting jerk, and there was a snapping sound. A great cry burst from me, and so sharp, so terrible was the pain, that I woke with the

agony of it to find myself, lying not on the cot but on the ground, with my left leg doubled up under me, and the morning sun staring into my room."

Mopping his face again, D. B. settled back in his chair and stared at us with a can-you-beat-that sort of look in his eyes.

"Splendid," said Cariappa, "A chimpanzee, a crocodile, and a cannibal. All in the same night too! Honestly, I didn't think you had it in you D. B."

D. B. ignored this remark. "My first impulse—" he began.

"Was to turn to the safe to see if it had been tampered with," completed Jungly, "your second, to look under the bed for the crocodile, your third to see what was wrong with your leg."

"Exactly," said D. B. registering surprise, "But how did you know?"

"Elementary, Watson, elementary," said Jungly leaning back, and putting the tips of his fingers together, "You are denser than usual to-day. You forget how well we know your character."

There was a general laugh at this.

"But what does it all mean?" asked D. B., looking fearfully puzzled. "I never had a dream like this before. What's the meaning of it?"

“Ask me not in mournful numbers,” murmured Jungly, “life is but an empty dream.”

“I know,” said Cariappa, “merely another instance of the Mayor not agreeing with his Corporation.”

“It means,” said Rangiah, becoming almost cheerful at the thought, “It means that your system is breaking up. You’d better consult a doctor, or take some of those wonderful pills recommended for rich men and princes only.”

“Drink and the devil,” added Jungly, “Yo! Ho! Ho! and all that sort of thing.”

“I’ll tell you what” I said, suddenly, smitten with an idea. “That astrologer you were telling us about, Jungly, ought to be able to interpret this dream. You said he’d be round here, about this time. Let’s ask him.”

D. B. was at first opposed to this idea, saying he didn’t believe in rubbishy astrologers, but gave in when he found how intent the rest were on carrying it out. Jungly’s man we discovered had arrived. On being sent for, he came in with many salaams—a dried up little fellow, the only part of whose face we could see, it was so covered up, was a pair of burning eyes. Few of us could

restrain a smile, as patiently and decorously, he sat cross-legged before us.

"Allow me to introduce to you," said Jungly with a twinkle in his eye, "one who, by his own showing, is the most distinguished astrologer in India, whose prophetic powers have elicited the unstinted admiration of the greatest in the land. Come D. B., out with your ghastly tale! Or, better still, shall I place the facts before the oracle? It may save time. Very well then! —"

With commendable brevity, but omitting none of the significant facts, Jungly told the story of D. B.'s dream, while the astrologer sat nodding his head, taking it all in with a quiet intensity that was vastly entertaining. Asked at the end to interpret the dream, he muttered a short prayer, produced a small bag of cowrie shells and a piece of charcoal from his voluminous wrappings, and gravely enquired the day on which he had dreamt the dream, the exact time at which he had gone to bed that night, whether he had seen the new moon that quarter, and if so the day and the hour, and the precise moment of his birth. These questions having been answered, he proceeded to draw a diagram on the ground with the charcoal,

and after sundry manipulations of the shells accompanied by frantic mutterings, he suddenly paused, lifted his eyes, and spoke in a high-pitched voice.

“Sir,” he said, “the dream is of a terrifying nature to those who do not understand these things. But I assure you there is nothing to fear. Nothing to fear. Some loss now—but much gain later. Sorrow first—joy afterwards. To dream of a monkey is not good. It foreshadows bodily harm, but the leap of the crocodile, a creature rarely met with in dreams, is a certain sign of great profit in the near future. This counteracts the robbery. The last part of the dream I interpret to mean the punishment of enemies. Also Jupiter being in the Seventh House, and Saturn not having risen at all, while Mercury and the Moon are together in the Ninth, the conditions are most favourable for happiness and prosperity and the goodwill of superiors. There are indications also of the impending birth of a female child—”

“D—d rot!” said Rangiah in a disgusted whisper.

“That will do,” said D. B. hastily, “You’d better come up to my house some time and tell me the rest there.”

The Ghost City

"A Daniel, a Daniel!" murmured Jungly. "All right Panditji," he continued, turning to the astrologer, "My friend is perfectly satisfied. He wants to meditate on what you have said. The impending birth of a female child is no joke, you know. You may therefore leave us - Yes, you may see me to-morrow." And "Panditji" withdrew.

"Extraordinary fellow that," said D. B. "Wonder what he meant by all that rigmarole."

"The revelation may come to you in another dream," said Rangiah sarcastically.

"It might," said D. B. rising, "and again it might not. Enough however is as good as a feast. About time we thought of home isn't it? Well good-night everybody."

"Pleasant dreams," sang Jungly after him.

That was the last I saw of D. B. for about a year. I was transferred a few days later, quite unexpectedly, to a god forsaken hole called Gondipatla. Imagine my surprise when a week or so after I got there, I came across the following in a newspaper: -

SENSATIONAL BURGLARY AT GELMARA

The residence of Mr. Rodriguez, Chairman of the Gelmara municipality was broken into last night

Fulfilment

by burglars who carried away valuables and money to the tune of Rs. 34,000. Mr. Rodriguez, who was awakened just as the burglars were decamping with their loot, promptly gave chase but slipped and fell down the stairs and broke his left leg in two places. Lt.-Col. Piercebbody, who was called in immediately, has set the leg and Mr. Rodriguez is, we understand, progressing satisfactorily. A reward of Rs. 5,000 has been announced, and Police investigations have already, we hear, led to several arrests. A curious feature of the case is a strange dream which Mr. Rodriguez is said to have had some days ago, foretelling the robbery in almost every particular. Great excitement prevails in the town, and much sympathy is felt for Mr. Rodriguez in his misfortune.

The first thing I did after reading this astonishing piece of news was to dash off a letter to D. B. expressing my concern and wishing him a speedy recovery. Eagerly as I scanned the papers thereafter, no further news of the robbery appeared, and as for my letter, I received no reply to that.

A few months later I was transferred back to Gelmara, and stopped a day in Madras on my way, when whom should I run into at the Nettloss Stores but D. B., looking as prosperous and cheerful as ever. It hadn't been quite so bad as I

The Ghast City

had feared, I thought. Later, at Tobosino's, over a drink, I had the whole story.

"You remember that dream I told you fellows that day at the club," said D. B. putting his tumbler down, "Well, astonishingly enough, things happened pretty much as I told you. My house, as you know, was burgled, exactly a week later. I woke up suddenly in the night to find two fellows busy at my safe, while a great black dog stood like a sentinel by my side. The first movement I made, the brute was at my throat with a suppressed snarl. Realising that I was awake the scoundrels bolted with what they had got, and, when they had got out, called the dog away. Rid of the dog, I gave chase shouting frantically, but in the darkness and confusion slipped and fell down the stairs and broke my leg. Not a pleasant thing to happen to one, is it, on top of a loss of several thousands of rupees? Early next morning, Piercebody set the leg. This was only the beginning of my troubles; for, seven weeks later, he told me calmly, after having taken the bandages off, that things weren't all right, that the bones hadn't united properly, and that the only course left, if I wished to continue in the land of the living, was amputation. I said I would rather die than hop my body about on one

leg, and absolutely refused to have anything more to do with him. He went away in a huff, and I had then recourse to every variety and shade of medical opinion, without obtaining any benefit. Then, when things were really desperate, I heard of a bone-setter who lived right away in the interior. Neither love nor money could make this man come to me, and so Mahomet had to go to the mountain instead. The greater part of the journey was done in a car, but the last seven miles had to be performed in a manjil. My dream again, you see. I was never more astonished than when I realised, suddenly, how remarkably events were shaping. You may call it coincidence or anything else you like, but there was I lying in a hammock, being slung along to the monotonous *Hi-Ho-Hi-Ho* of my bearers; there was the river on one side, and there, true enough, was that devilish ache in my leg; everything exactly as I told you."

"Even down to the crocodile?" I asked.

"Almost, but not quite," said D. B. "The nearest we came to that was to see one lying on the bank of the river at a respectable distance. Well, presently we left the river and waded through innumerable narrow passages between low hills, all of them knee-deep in water on

account of the rains, until at last we arrived at a house set upon a kind of island in the midst of the water, and up to which we had to climb by a series of narrow and very slippery wooden steps. And there was my African village, thatched huts, boiling vats, and witch-doctor, complete as per specifications. The latter proved to be the bone-setter whose fame had brought me there, and what I saw before me was his consulting room and nursing-home combined. At the moment, the latter was attending to the elbow of a man who seemed to be in great pain. Imagine my surprise when I recognized in this man Jungly's astrologer chap! Another coincidence if you like! The moment this man saw me he gave a yelp and turned his face away. That set me thinking. Now why should he have done that? I was still thinking, when the witch-doctor, I mean the bone-setter, came towards me. Well, to cut a long story short, he contrived to do for me what the combined medical profession of South India had been unable to do. He set me on my legs in eight weeks, and every one said it was a most marvellous cure. Meanwhile the Police had succeeded in arresting a whole lot of people, but the charges against them fell through for want of sufficient evidence. At last, on my

Fulfilment

suggestion, they instituted a search for that astrologer fellow, and nabbed him with the goods! As I had suspected ever since my visit to the bone-setter, he had organized the whole thing. Was it his fault that he should break his arm and go to the same medicine man, and at the same time as I did? Well he's got full fourteen years in which to think the whole matter out. Pity he could not foresee that."

"Wonderful!" I said. "Never heard of a dream coming true in just this sort of way before. Most extraordinary."

"Isn't it?" agreed D. B., heaving himself out of his chair. "As who-is-it says, 'There are more things in heaven and earth—'"

"Than even astrologers dream of," I concluded, rising and following him out.



SOUNDS AND IMAGES

BY G. K. CHETTUR

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BY

G. K. CHETTUR, M. A. (Oxon.)

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*A comprehensive Text-book of English Composition
for use in Colleges*

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